BBC

ESCAPING FROM COLDITZ

How Allied PoWs outwitted their German captors

HISTORY MAGAZINE

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE
November 2022 / **www.historyextra.com**

What doomed the MARY ROSE?

Did bad weather, French guns or incompetence send Henry VIII's warship to the seabed?

FACT-CHECKING THE PAST
Is there such a thing as historical truth?

Gorbachev: Cold War hero or failed idealist?

The mystery of Agatha Christie
Lucy Worsley on the crime writer's puzzling disappearance

Nasty, smelly and short

Were medieval peasants' lives really all that bad?

Celebrating 25 Years of Magic

HARRY POTTER

In 1997, Bloomsbury Children's Books published *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Twenty-five years on, this UK 50p coin celebrates the magical world created by J.K. Rowling in this spellbinding story about a boy wizard and his friends. The reverse design features an original illustration by Jim Kay, the artist who created the first fully illustrated edition of this Harry Potter story.

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WELCOME

NOVEMBER 2022

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

Shortly before we went to press came the sad and momentous news of the death of **Queen Elizabeth II**. We will reflect on her historic reign next month, and in the meantime you can find several articles on our website, where we have also made our recent special edition, *The Queen*, available to download for free. You can find that at *historyextra.com/queenbookazine* or by scanning the QR code (right). You will need to register for the site to access it, if you haven't done so already.

The Queen's passing came barely a week after another major figure departed the stage. **Mikhail Gorbachev** was the final ruler of the Soviet Union and a man who, in the west at least, has been widely feted for his role in defusing the Cold War. In our piece on page 18 three experts offer different perspectives on his remarkable career.

For our cover feature we're heading back to the Tudor age and the sinking of **Henry VIII's favourite warship, the *Mary Rose***. It was 40 years ago this month that the vessel was famously raised from the seabed, but what had caused the ship's demise in the first place? On page 50, Emily Briffett examines some of the competing theories, and if you enjoy her piece then do look out for the accompanying podcast series, which will be arriving on our website and podcast feed soon.

Rob Attar
Editor

THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. A vote for change
In our interview with Paterson Joseph for *My History Hero*, he reveals that the Georgian writer Ignatius Sancho was the first black Briton to vote in an election (page 98).

2. Join the club
Many fascinating details emerged from my conversation with Ben Macintyre about Colditz, including the fact that there was a Bullingdon Club at the notorious PoW camp (page 34).

3. Disney's history lesson
History often informs TV dramas, but I hadn't been aware that the recent Disney+ series *Ms Marvel* contained a storyline drawing on the 1947 partition of India (page 17). I'll have to check it out.

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Rob Blackmore
"Historical facts are slippery things. Our evidence for the past is imperfect, and interpretations vary. People pass on lies and mistakes. But, I argue, we can – and should – still try to find them."
Rob considers the challenges of sticking to the facts in history on page 41

Kristina Spohr
"Gorbachev's aim was not to turn to capitalism or social democracy, but instead to reinvigorate the Soviet Union from 'within the system'. The problem was that the more he restructured, the more he lost control of the processes he set in motion."
Kristina reflects on the pivotal role of the USSR's last leader on page 18

Pamela Roberts
"My rediscovery of James Arthur Harley's archive led me on a five-year journey, visiting Antigua, Barbuda, America and Kentish villages, to tell the amazing story of this black Edwardian intellectual."
Pamela profiles a trailblazing black priest who took on the establishment on page 38

Lucy Worsley
"Agatha Christie often portrayed herself as an ordinary woman who fell into megastardom by accident. I've loved the challenge of trying to unpick that, and finding out who she might really have been."
Lucy chronicles the crime writer's extraordinary life on page 74

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Subscriptions & back issues *BBC History Magazine*, PO Box 3320, 3 Queensbridge, Northampton, NN4 7BF. Basic annual subscription rates: UK: £84.50, Eire/Europe: € 120, USA: $168.87, AUS/NZ: AU$180 ROW: $136

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ON THE COVER: THE HULL OF THE MARY ROSE IN THE MARY ROSE SHIP HALL IN PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC DOCKYARD: ALAMY, HENRY VIII PORTRAIT BY HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER: GETTY IMAGES. PLOUGHMAN, 13TH CENTURY: ALAMY. MAZUMDAR: STAATLICHE SCHLÖSSER, BURGEN UND GARTENSACHSEN GMBH, SCHLOSS COLDITZ; GREEN: BONHAMS; LEBRUN: ALAMY. THIS PAGE: ALAMY/JENI NOTT/FRAN MONKS

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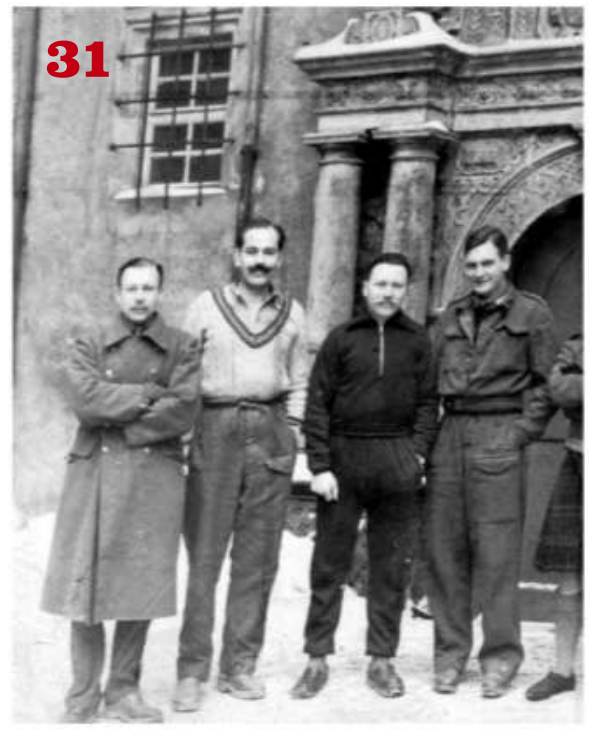

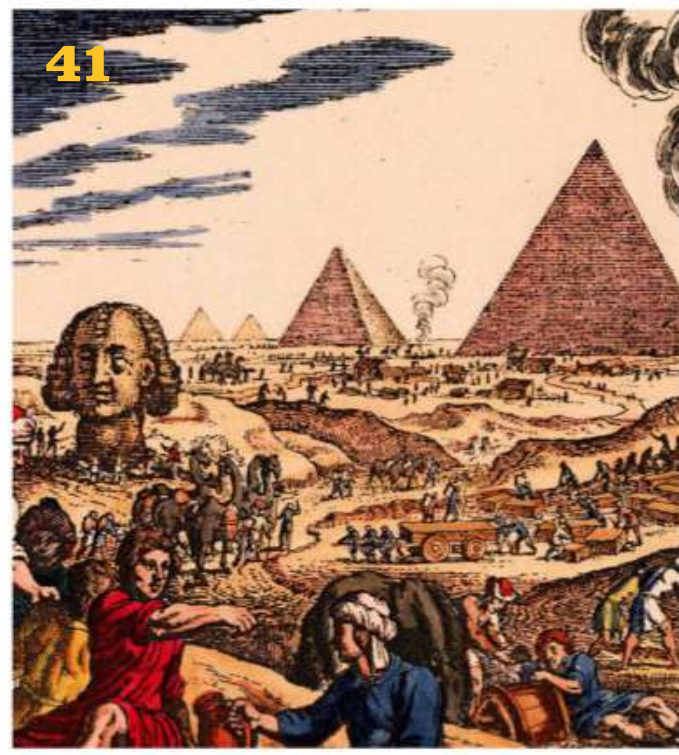

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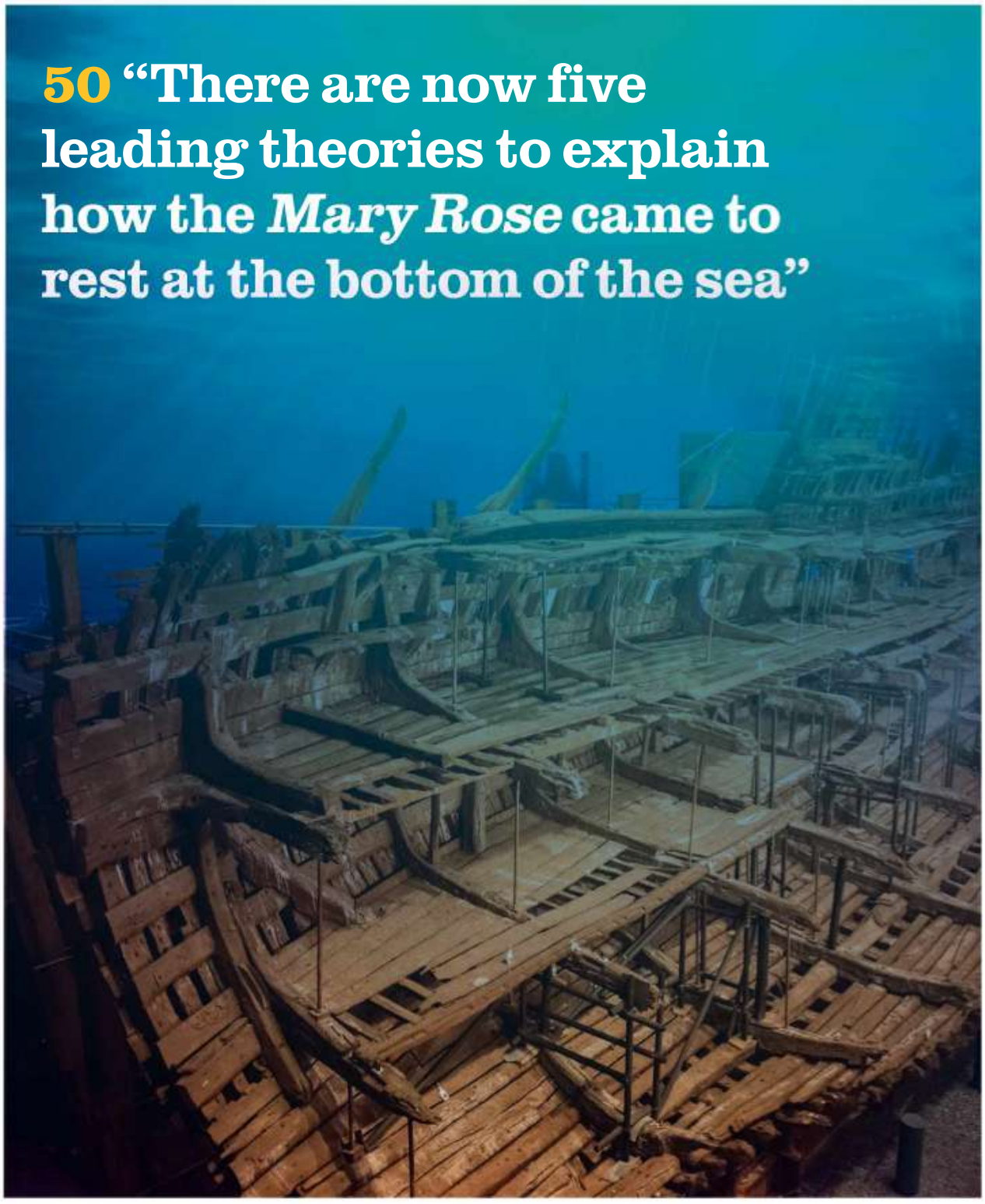

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BRIDGEMAN/DREAMSTIME/EYEVINE AND TOPFOTO

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THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

EYE-OPENER

Lost and found

The reappearance of a ghost village in northern Spain, submerged for three decades beneath a reservoir, was just one result of this year's droughts that was of interest to historians and the wider public.

The village of Aceredo, in Galicia, was submerged in 1992 when the land it stands on was flooded to create the Alto Lindoso reservoir on the Portuguese border. In February, waters dwindled to just 15 per cent of normal levels, and crowds of tourists – and some former residents – visited Aceredo to experience the eerie sensation of walking among buildings submerged for 30 years.

Elsewhere, much older sites, monuments, carvings and vessels were revealed as the waters of waterways and lakes receded. Sobering examples include "hunger stones" engraved on rocks on the shores of the river Elbe in Germany and the Czech Republic. Carved when previous droughts exposed stones in the riverbed, the earliest dates from the 15th century and was inscribed again in 1616 with words translating as: "If you see me, cry."

Further east, Nazi warships sunk in 1944 during the Second World War reappeared as water levels in the Danube fell.

The ghost village of Aceredo in Galicia, north-western Spain, exposed this year after three decades beneath the waters of the Alto Lindoso reservoir

GETTY IMAGES

Have a story? Please email Matt Elton at matt.elton@immediate.co.uk

TALKING POINTS

Hot fuss about the seventies

As older Britons recalled the heatwaves of the 1970s, many questioned whether that decade was better than the present. **ANNA WHITELOCK** reviews the diverse perspectives on Twitter

Amid countless economic – and meteorological – comparisons to the 1970s, **Jim Pickard** (@PickardJE) of the *Financial Times* asked Twitter: "was there *anything* good about the 1970s?" **Laura Marcus** (@MissLauraMarcus) responded immediately: "It really was a fantastic time to be young… Much less pressure than young people face today. The music was incredibly varied and gigs were cheap. As were rents. Jobs were well paid and plentiful…" **Richard Taylor** (@Flub1957) agreed: "It was far better balanced, more social mobility existed, people were less aggressive, and social services did generally work. Sufficient GPs, ambulances came on time, sheltered housing and council houses were adequate."

Broadcaster **Jon Sopel** (@jonsopel) dismissed it as a "ridiculous question: David Bowie singing Starman on TOTP. Summer of 76 (ladybirds a bit annoying). My Honda 400/4 motorbike. The romance of doing 2nd form homework by candlelight cos no electricity. The Ford Capri and Rover 2000. Winter of Discontent a bit shit I grant you." **Monty Don** (@TheMontyDon) pointed to "Pink Floyd, punk, Fawlty Towers, Monty Python, a whole raft of films, house/rental prices, a real sense of opportunity, hitch hiking, cleaner air, fewer people, good beer at 15p a pint." And Conservative

Children enjoy a street party for the Queen's silver jubilee, 1977 – one good thing about that decade, according to tweeters

> **"Inequality in the UK hit its lowest ever level in the 1970s. The footie could be pretty epic, too"**

MP **James Cleverly** (@JamesCleverly) was compelled to tweet in praise of "The legend that was John Noakes. He made the whole decade worthwhile."

Cathie Wood (@cathie_wood) had a more negative view: "Where our current troubles began – social housing sold off with no replacements, rapid & brutal destruction of industrial heartlands with no exit strategy, crushing of local democracy & civic investment, loss of municipal buses, utility privatisations with weak regulators etc etc." **Tim Bale** (@ProfTimBale) had a different perspective, tweeting: "Inequality in the UK hit its lowest ever level – if you like that sort of thing. I also liked a lot of the music, and the footie could be pretty epic too."

David Osland (@David__Osland) pointed to "Secure well-paid jobs, plentiful social housing, final salary pensions, properly funded NHS and social care, free tuition and student grants, affordable rail fares and fabulous films and music. But apart from that, not a lot." **George Mann** (@sgfmann) tweeted evocatively: "Genuine social mobility, West Indies cricket, reggae, West Ham winning the cup, family all living a short bus ride away, the [Queen's] silver jubilee, Slade, my dad driving a yellow VW Beetle, massive changes to UK diet: pasta! Curry! Rice! All madness according to my mum. Clean beaches." **Libby Purves** (@lib_thinks) pointed to "Free university [and] classic radio and TV from a confident BBC. Punk rock. London grubby but full of young people in lousy but central digs and squats."

And me? Well obviously I'm too young (ish) to remember… H

Anna Whitelock is professor of the history of the monarchy at City, University of London

A colourised photo of Charles Dickens. Letters now displayed for the first time reveal how aware he was of his fame

HEALTH

Newly displayed letters reveal Dickens' self-importance

A cache of 11 previously unpublished letters offers novel insights into the habits, work and thoughts of the author of *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Great Expectations* (1861) – including a keen awareness of his own fame.

The letters, which were recently acquired by the Charles Dickens Museum in London as part of a collection of more than 300 items valued at £1.8m, went on display for the first time in late August. They date from the middle decades of the 19th century, and reveal many of his preoccupations – not least the importance of a regular postal service.

When the removal of local Sunday deliveries was mooted in 1866, Dickens wrote stridently that: "I most decidedly and strongly object to the infliction of any such inconvenience upon myself." That rather entitled response reflected how he perceived his standing in his local community, the Kentish village of Higham – and more widely.

"The letter complaining about the loss of Sunday postal delivery is a great example of Dickens showing self-importance, his awareness of his great fame and position in society coming to the fore," said Emily Dunbar, curator at the Charles Dickens Museum.

The letters are now on display at the museum, housed in Dickens' London home in Kings Cross, and available to view online (*dickensmuseum.com*). H

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

A piece of a medieval tile unearthed at the site of Hyde Abbey, resting place of Alfred the Great

Community dig near King Alfred's grave reveals water tunnel ▲

A volunteer-powered excavation has discovered a structure believed to be a water channel supplying the medieval abbey where Alfred the Great is buried.

In 1110, more than two centuries after his death in 899, the remains of Alfred, his wife and his son, Edward the Elder, were moved to the new Benedictine Hyde Abbey on the outskirts of his royal city, Winchester. The abbey was destroyed in the late 1530s after the dissolution of the monasteries on the orders of Henry VIII.

The community-led Hyde900 project was launched in 2010 to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the abbey's foundation. Over the past six years, a series of digs involving volunteers has explored the site of the abbey. The discovery of the vaulted water channel was made by the team digging in three gardens in King Alfred Terrace, believed to be the site of the medieval cloisters and abbot's lodgings.

As well as the culvert, which probably supplied water to the abbey's kitchens, refectory and infirmary, the excavation uncovered artefacts including medieval tiles, Roman pottery and oyster shells.

Huge megalithic complex discovered in southern Spain ▼

A cluster of ancient monuments including more than 500 standing stones, some 3 metres tall and dating back perhaps 7,000 years or more, has been found in the south-western Spanish province of Huelva.

The diverse megaliths at the site of La Torre-La Janera came to light during an archaeological survey of a proposed avocado plantation. Among the monuments revealed by the survey are 526 menhirs plus dolmens (ancient stone-capped tombs), burial mounds and cists (stone coffins), cromlechs (stone circles) and alignments of standing stones. Some bear symbolic engravings.

"This is the biggest and most diverse collection of standing stones grouped together in the Iberian peninsula," José Antonio Linares, a researcher at Huelva University, is reported as saying. The oldest were probably erected in the late sixth millennium BC, when this spot would have been much closer to the coast.

The ongoing survey and analysis of the monuments is likely to continue for several more years, though part of the site may be open to visitors within months.

A menhir (ritual standing stone) at the recently discovered La Torre-La Janera megalithic site in south-west Spain

HYDE900/BRIDGEMAN/HUELVA INFORMACIÓN

Medieval friars were infected with parasitic worms ▼

Parasite infestations were rife among medieval friars in Cambridge, a new study reveals. And surprisingly, though the friars had access to better sanitation than the townsfolk, they suffered more infections. Analysis of soil samples from the graves of Augustinian friars and nearby parishioners in Cambridge revealed that 58 per cent of the former were infected with roundworm and whipworm, compared to 32 per cent of the general population. The difference may reflect the use of human faeces to fertilise soil in the friars' vegetable gardens. H

MICHAEL WOOD ON...
THOMAS MANN AND THE THREAT OF UNREASON

"Even highly educated people can adjust to unreason and violence"

In 1950, *The New Yorker* magazine reviewed an anthology by the German novelist and Nobel laureate Thomas Mann, then at the summit of his fame and living in exile in the US. The book, it said, gave the impression of "a major writer – but perhaps not all *that* major". Mann, needless to say, was phlegmatic – as well he might have been, being the world's most famous novelist. But the review carried the suggestion that he was a literary monolith who had outlived his proper time – a relic of the pre-First World War German bourgeoisie, no longer relevant in the age of rock'n'roll and the Beat poets.

In Europe, though, Mann was still received with deep seriousness, not least in his belief that Nazism had deep roots in the German national psyche. In my student days, the great novelists writing in German – Hesse, Musil, Mann, Broch – were the canon. The crisis of European culture in the mid-20th century, the descent into the horrors of Nazism, we were told, could not be understood without them.

But time and tastes change. These days, such hefty books have less appeal. So I took Colm Tóibín's 2021 novel about Mann, *The Magician*, with me on holiday without great conviction. But it's a compelling story. It presents a self-preoccupied and repressed loner, not unlikeable, but a trickster whose novels fed on the lives of those around him, his own family most of all. And it is eerily prophetic.

Mann was born in 1875 into a family of Lübeck merchants. Aged 26, he found instant fame with *Buddenbrooks*, a multi-generational family saga. During the First World War, when he was in his forties, he supported the kaiser, attacked liberalism and supported the war effort, calling the conflict "a purification, a liberation, an enormous hope". His *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918) shows his patriotic fervour and his contempt for western democracy. Later, when the Nazis came to power, Mann saw the book as a great error – the product of ignorance, an example of how even highly educated people can adjust to unreason and violence. It's a lesson whose ideas have been demonstrated recently in the US, where a YouGov survey reported that nearly half of Republicans supported the attack on the Capitol on 6 January 2021 by a mob attempting to prevent Trump's loss in the 2020 election being formalised.

We've seen where unreason can lead in the horrors of Nazism. What produces it, Mann had seen from the inside – he had been that person. Later, he made speeches, wrote articles and contributed to BBC radio broadcasts denouncing Nazism, but it was too late. Across the world today, we face massive threats to democracy. Rightwing populism and even fascism are on the rise. Democracy means the informed consent of the governed – but if up to 40 per cent of people in the US believe the lie that the 2020 presidential election was stolen (according to a poll in January 2022), we should be worried.

A key part of Tóibín's novel concerns Mann's relationship with his brother Heinrich, a novelist and essayist. While Thomas had argued that war could be purging, and enlightenment was suspect (even treacherous), Heinrich never fell for the lure of a nationalism that slides into jingoism, militarism, racism and anti-Semitism.

By 1922, Mann was backpedalling, and supported the Weimar democracy. He worried that he had contributed to the descent into Nazism and went on to write warnings about the Nazis, about the concentration camps, and, later, about McCarthyism. "Let me tell you the whole truth," he said, prophetically: "If ever fascism should come to America, it will come in the name of freedom."

Tóibín's book features a haunting passage on how a culture carries the seeds of its own descent into unreason. It describes Mann at a concert, listening to one of Beethoven's late string quartets, Opus 132, often seen as a pinnacle of European music. If music can conjure such feelings, Mann reflects: "What would the music that led to the German catastrophe sound like? It would not be war music, or marching music. It would not need drums. It could be sweeter than that, more sly and silky. What happened in Germany would need a music not only sombre but slippery and ambiguous, with a parody of seriousness, alert to the idea that it was not only desire for territory or riches that gave rise to this mockery of culture that was Germany now. It was the very culture itself, he thought, the actual culture that had formed him and people like him, that contained the seeds of its own destruction. The culture had proved defenceless and useless against pressure."

In democracies across the world, we are watching that pressure grow. We can't say we haven't been warned. H

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series, and his most recent book is an updated version of *In Search of the Dark Ages* (BBC, 2022). His Twitter handle is @mayavision

ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

A gift of hope

THE BRITISH RED CROSS HAS BEEN SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN CRISIS FOR MORE THAN 150 YEARS, AND WITH YOUR HELP, IT CAN CONTINUE PUTTING KINDNESS INTO ACTION

BY MEHZEBIN ADAM-SUTER, CURATOR, BRITISH RED CROSS MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

When crisis strikes, the British Red Cross is always there, helping millions of people in the UK and around the world get the support they need. The charity has provided aid in many different ways over the years, including helping prisoners of war and civilian internees during World War II.

After Singapore surrendered to the Japanese army in 1942, citizens from more than 20 countries, who had been living and working in the Far East, were imprisoned in the Changi Jail in eastern Singapore. By 1945, the jail was severely overcrowded, with approximately 4,500 people forced to endure its extremely harsh conditions. Families were split up as women and children were held separately from the men, and many suffered from malnutrition and diseases such as malaria. The Red Cross aided prisoners by sending food parcels to ensure as many as possible received adequate nutrition.

< British Red Cross Changi quilt, 1942. The other two quilts are held at the Australian War Memorial

CREATIVITY IN CAPTIVITY

Astonishingly, many prisoners managed to craft fascinating items while in Changi Jail, including quilts. Ethel Mulvany, a Canadian prisoner and Red Cross representative, suggested the women work together to create patchwork quilts for the wounded men in the prison camp's hospital. It's believed the quilts' material mostly originated from rice, sugar and flour bags sent by the Red Cross, and each contributor was asked to embroider 'something of herself' onto a square – with some even using the quilts to communicate with male family members. For some men, the quilts brought the first news that their loved ones had survived.

Three Changi quilts were made in total, one each for the Red Cross Societies of Britain, Australia and Japan. The Australian and Japanese quilts are held at the Australian War Memorial, while the third is displayed at the *Museum of Kindness* exhibition at the British Red Cross. **To visit the British Red Cross Museum, email museum@redcross.org.uk**.

< Each quilt square was embroidered by a different woman imprisoned in Changi Jail

BritishRedCross

LEAVE A LEGACY

The work carried out by the British Red Cross is as essential today as it was during World War II. And thanks to the generosity of people leaving gifts in their wills, the charity can continue to support those in need.

Through the British Red Cross's Free Will writing service, you can write or update your will for free with the help of a trusted local solicitor of your choice. Although there is no obligation to leave a gift, by choosing to do so, you would be offering a lifeline to vulnerable people during their darkest hour. **Will you leave a gift of hope for the future?**

For more information about supporting the British Red Cross with a gift in your will and the Free Will scheme, visit redcross.org.uk/freewill or call 0300 500 0401

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ANNIVERSARIES

HELEN CARR highlights events that took place in November in history

16 NOVEMBER 1272

Henry III's death *doesn't* plunge England into crisis

After many tumultuous years, the crown passes seamlessly to the old king's chosen heir

For many decades after Edward the Confessor breathed his last in 1066, the death of an English king wasn't met by just grief – it regularly caused an outpouring of violence in the form of an invasion or a brutal civil war. So it's unsurprising that when Henry III lay dying in 1272, his fervent wish was for the crown to pass to his heir, the future Edward I, without bloodshed.

This hope may have seemed particularly far-fetched because Prince Edward wasn't even in the country. The warrior prince had been granted leave to go on crusade for one time only; having fought in the Holy Land, Edward was still en route home to England while Henry lay on his deathbed. Just after landing in Trapani, Sicily, Edward received the unwelcome news that his father had died at Westminster on 16 November. Distraught, he informed his host, Charles of Anjou, that his father was irreplaceable.

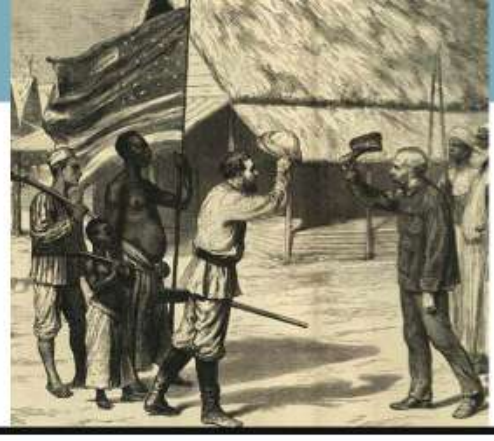
Devastating as Henry's death was for Edward, it did not spark another bloody power struggle. For once, the succession was seamless, and England's barons pledged their loyalty to their new king shortly after Henry's body was interred.

This peaceful transfer of power was made even more remarkable by the fact that Edward – still taking a leisurely route home from the crusades – didn't actually set foot on English soil again until 1274.

A portrait thought to be of Edward I. His accession to England's throne was the most peaceful in centuries

Wallachian prince Vlad III enjoys dinner surrounded by impaled victims in this 1499 woodcut. Long after he was killed by the Ottomans, his legend inspired Stoker's *Dracula*

BRIDGEMAN/.AKG/GETTY IMAGES



A 19th-century illustration of Stanley's 1871 meeting with Livingstone

10 NOVEMBER 1871

After two years scouring Africa, journalist Henry Morton Stanley reaches Lake Tanganyika and greets the Scot for whom he's long searched with the words: **"Dr Livingstone, I presume?"**

26 NOVEMBER 1476

Vlad III reclaims the throne of Wallachia

The dreaded "Impaler" is proclaimed prince for the third time

The proclamation of Vlad III – also called Vlad Dracula ("son of the dragon") – as prince of Wallachia, in what's now Romania, in November 1476 may not have been greeted with universal joy. For one thing, it didn't exactly signal a new dawn: this would be his third stint as ruler. His first had lasted a mere two months before he was deposed. His second, though, was longer and more memorable – for all the wrong reasons.

During that reign, from 1456 to 1462, Vlad became infamous for the cruel violence he used against those who slighted or opposed him. When Ottoman envoys refused to remove their turbans in his presence, he ordered their headwear nailed to their skulls. And he reputedly had many of those who displeased him skewered on long wooden spikes, earning the gruesome moniker Vlad Țepeș ("The Impaler").

As young boys, Vlad and his younger brother Radu had been held as hostages by the Ottomans for five years, and for much of his reign Vlad was at war with that empire. In 1462, Radu joined an imperial army fighting Wallachia; during the conflict that followed, many thousands of Ottoman soldiers were impaled by Vlad, who was nonetheless forced into exile.

In 1475, though, Radu died, and Vlad took Wallachia for a third time the following year. He was proclaimed prince on or before 26 November 1476 – but his final reign was brief. While marching into battle in 1477, Vlad was ambushed and killed by Ottoman forces. The location of his corpse remains unknown, and this – coupled with his dark reputation – prompted rumours that he was undead: a vampire. Centuries later, these eerie tales partly inspired Bram Stoker's blood-sucking Count Dracula.

Elizabeth of York, pictured c1502, helped establish the Tudor royal dynasty

25 NOVEMBER 1487

Elizabeth of York is crowned queen of England, a year after her marriage to Henry VII and two years after his victory at Bosworth augured the end of the Wars of the Roses.

Sailors hunt a sperm whale in this 1835 engraving. Fifteen years earlier, the *Essex* was sunk by an aggressive whale, its crew left adrift in the Pacific and fighting for their lives

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

20 NOVEMBER 1820

A giant sperm whale attacks the *Essex*

The macabre fate of the whaling expedition later inspires Moby Dick

"My head is on fire at the recollection. I hardly know what I say," proclaimed George Pollard, the broken captain of the *Essex*, shortly after his return home. His mental turmoil was understandable: the horrors that befell his crew in late 1820 had been almost unthinkable.

The *Essex* had sailed from Nantucket, Massachusetts in August 1819 with a 21-strong crew, on a whaling expedition planned to last more than two years. By November 1820, Pollard's ship was far out in the South Pacific, hundreds of miles from the nearest land.

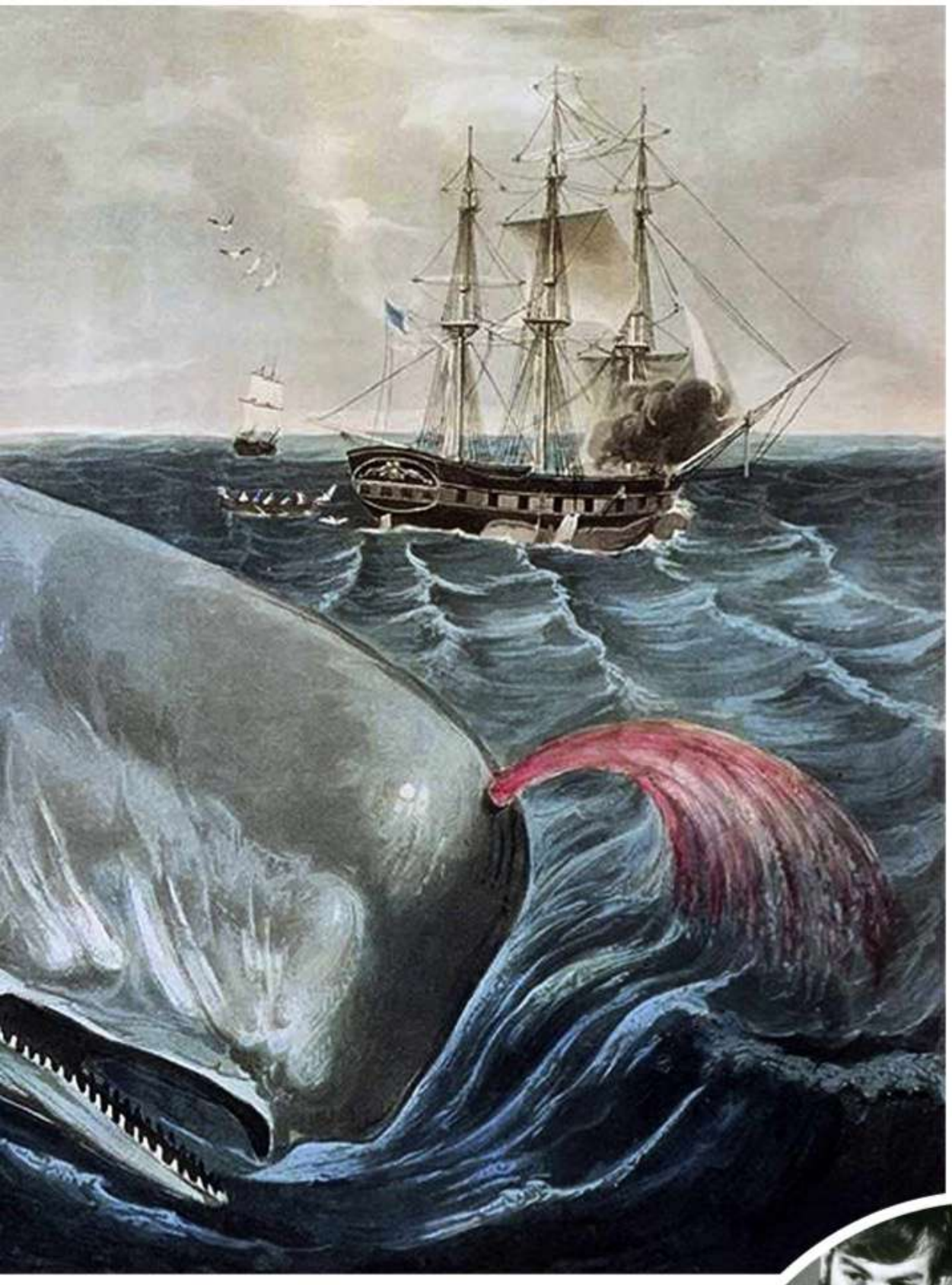
On the 20th of the month, Pollard recounted, he was working aboard one of the smaller whaleboats when the first mate on the *Essex*, Owen Chase, spotted a huge sperm whale that he estimated to be about 26 metres long. The behemoth swam full pelt at the ship and rammed the vessel with a thunderous blow. Seawater gushed inside, and the *Essex* began sinking rapidly. "We have been stove by a whale!" Chase yelled to the returning captain.

As the ship disappeared beneath the waves, the crew clambered into three 8-metre-long boats and set out to find land. The Marquesas and Society Islands were closest but, having heard rumours of cannibalism, the crew convinced their captain to steer clear of those archipelagos. It was an

A scene from Beethoven's opera *Fidelio,* which premiered in 1805

20 NOVEMBER 1805

The first version of **Ludwig van Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*** premieres in Vienna – to an audience comprising mostly officers from Napoleon's occupying army.



AKG-IMAGES

ill-fated decision: the crew had insufficient supplies to survive a longer journey.

Nine weeks after the *Essex* was lost, her crew were still fruitlessly searching for land. Wretched with hunger, with the boats separated and marooned in a fish-less sea, the sailors finally resorted to cannibalism. In February and March, three months after the whale attack, the survivors were picked up.

Pollard's maritime career, already in tatters, soon ended altogether and he returned to Nantucket. Some 32 years after the whale attack, the captain spoke to writer Herman Melville. The result, inspired by that terrible story, was the novel *Moby Dick*.

24 NOVEMBER 1974

Scientists discover an early member of the human family

The fossils provide new clues about human evolution

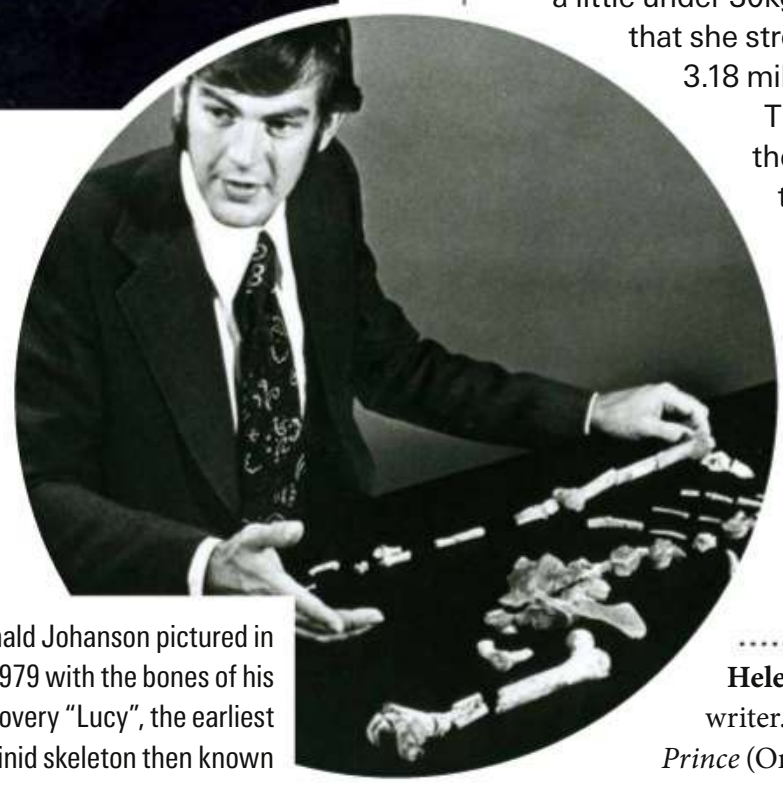
The intense Ethiopian sun burned down on palaeoanthropologist Donald Johanson and student Tom Gray as they completed their morning's work: hunting for fossils. Their search had taken them to Hadar, in the north of the Great Rift Valley – the region stretching down through east Africa known as the "cradle of humankind", where the earliest human ancestors evolved.

To escape the sweltering midday heat, they decided to head back to their Land Rover. As they packed up their equipment, Johanson suggested returning through a gully they hadn't yet studied. Picking their way along this new path, they soon spotted an object sticking out of the hard ground.

It looked to be part of an ulna – one of the bones of the forearm. Electrified by possibility, they began to dig and before long had recovered the arm bone, a skull and jawbone, a femur, ribs and a pelvic bone. The shapes of the various bones suggested that these could be the remains of what was then the earliest known hominid – the first known pre-human species able to walk upright.

Their suspicions were confirmed over the forthcoming weeks. Further digging recovered more fragments of bone, altogether representing about 40 per cent of a complete skeleton. In life, the female – her gender identified by her pelvic bone – would have stood straight at just over a metre tall, and weighed a little under 30kg. Later analysis revealed that she strode this region about 3.18 million years ago.

That night, celebrations in the camp were riotous. The team drank and danced under the stars, toasting their unprecedented discovery while listening to the Beatles' hit 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds' – inspiring the name given to the individual whose skeleton they'd found: Lucy. H



Donald Johanson pictured in 1979 with the bones of his discovery "Lucy", the earliest hominid skeleton then known

Helen Carr is a historian and writer. Her latest book is *The Red Prince* (Oneworld, 2021)

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HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI explores lesser-known stories from our past

"Mainstream drama can expose wider audiences to little-known history"

I have recently been in the strange position of seeing my book *Partition Voices* adapted for the theatre. Based on eyewitness accounts marking the 70th anniversary of independence and partition, it tells the story of partition and its legacy on people who now live all around us in Britain. In my day job I deal in facts and evidence, so to impart these precious testimonies (with the interviewees' blessing) to be interpreted and dramatised by four writers was an entry into an unknown world.

But the possibility that this relatively little-known history – particularly the lived experience of partition and its enduring effects in Britain – could reach a wider audience through a different medium was very appealing. So, too, was the fact that the Tara Theatre, the UK's oldest British south Asian theatre company and one steeped in this history, is involved in the co-production with the Donmar Warehouse.

Other recent dramas have also tackled south Asian history. The Disney+ series *Ms Marvel* includes a storyline featuring partition, and was widely praised for handling the subject in a sensitive and nuanced way. The plot tells the story of a Pakistani-American teenager, Kamala, who gains superhero powers from a mysterious bangle that belonged to her great-grandmother who disappeared during the partition. The bangle leads Kamala to a past otherwise unknown to her, and we see how it shapes who she is today.

The programme was carefully researched, drawing on archival testimony from the independent collections of the Citizen's Archive of Pakistan and the Citizen's Archive of India. It provoked much wider discussion about partition and its intergenerational legacy, with viewers swapping "recommend reading" lists to help each other learn more about the history. A 2018 episode of British sci-fi series *Doctor Who* by screenwriter and playwright Vinay Patel featuring a partition storyline sparked a similar response.

Carefully researched storylines in mainstream drama can expose a wider audience to lesser-known history. But when history is made into film, television or theatre, what is the responsibility to remain true to historical accuracy, and to what extent should it be open to dramatic licence? In some cases, the interpretation has completely distorted the facts. A particularly egregious example is the 2000 film *U-571*. It's spring 1942, and a German submarine is commandeered by disguised American submariners in a bid to capture its Enigma machine. The only problem with that plot? The real U-571 was never captured. The film was based on a real 1941 operation in which British sailors recovered the code machine (the US had not yet entered the war). After its release, then prime minister Tony Blair agreed with critics calling the film "an affront" to the Royal Navy.

A drama is not a history book with footnotes. But there has to be a responsibility not to deviate so far from historical accuracy – or at least to be explicit and label it a work of fiction. I think this is especially important when dealing with stories based on real people.

The adaptation of my book, entitled *Silence*, is not verbatim testimony but instead a dramatisation inspired by the accounts, and as a result the director decided to change the names of the interviewees. In this case, a dramatisation allows the writers and director to play with memory, its fragmentary nature and how it shifts between the past and present, while respecting the historical facts. I have watched these first-hand accounts transformed into something I had never imagined. Just as history is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by historians, so these accounts are being reinterpreted in the dramatic sphere.

Because the play has been written five years after I first carried out the interviews, the contemporary context has also changed. As a nation, we have been debating how to remember our colonial past, as a younger generation seeks to understand its legacy.

There is a particular power to oral history which lends itself to the dramatic form. It is another way for history to come alive, reach an audience who may not pick up a history book, and feel relevant today. H

Kavita Puri is a journalist, broadcaster and author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, updated for 2022). Her Radio 4 show, *Inheritors of Partition*, is available on BBC Sounds

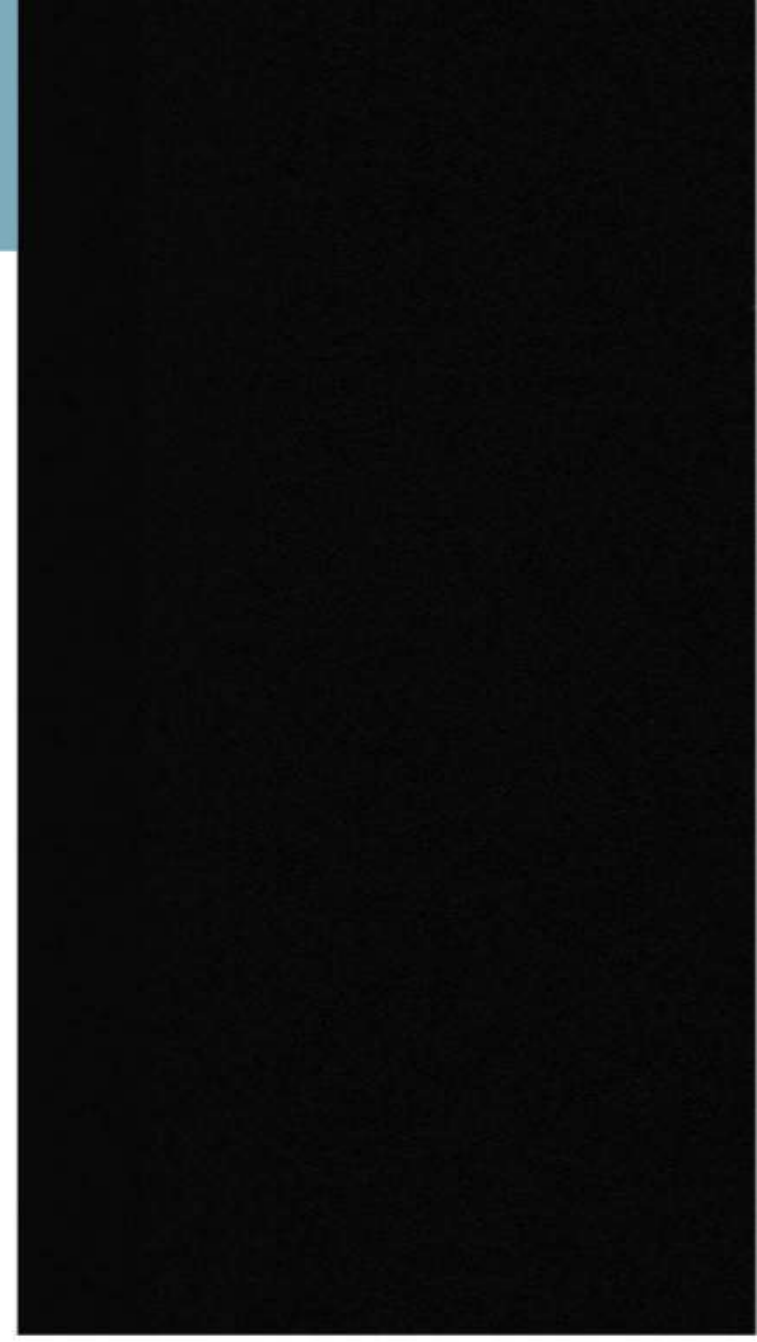
Iman Vellani as Kamala, the title character of *Ms Marvel*. One of the first season's storylines sees Kamala uncover her family's connections to partition

ALAMY

Cold War hero or failed idealist?

Respected in the west but often condemned in his former homeland, Mikhail Gorbachev is a divisive figure. Following his death in August, we asked three experts to offer their takes on the life and global legacy of the Soviet Union's final leader

COMPILED BY **MATT ELTON**



Mikhail Gorbachev started an avalanche he could not control

DAVID REYNOLDS

Gorbachev was a classic example of a reformer who unwittingly precipitated a revolution. When, aged 54, he took over as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in March 1985, he seemed a breath of fresh air after the wheezing old leaders of the past. But rather like France's Ancien Régime in the 1780s, his bid to modernise party and state brought down the whole house of cards and then spawned an imperialist dictator.

Initially, Gorbachev's buzzword was *uskoreniye*, or acceleration – getting things moving but still within the framework of the government-run command economy. Yet lack of progress pushed him into a more radical restructuring of industry and the party (*perestroika*), which required greater openness and transparency (*glasnost*).
A catalyst was the explosion in April 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine (then one of the Soviet republics), which released more radioactive material into the atmosphere than the US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

The disaster transformed domestic and foreign policy. It started a protest movement against the USSR's appalling environmental pollution, which powered wider political agitation. It undermined Gorbachev's push for nuclear power to offset the USSR's reliance on oil and natural gas, eroding economic stability just as he began clumsy attempts to create a "regulated market economy". And it reinforced his determination to reduce the arms burden on the economy through agreements with the United States, mostly achieved by significant Soviet concessions. Yet he had gained a new sense that "we live in a vulnerable" but "interconnected world", and this never left him.

In 1988–89, Gorbachev embraced cautious democratisation. A special CPSU conference endorsed competitive elections and set limits on terms of office. This was intended to open up the ruling party and encourage new blood. Among those elected was Boris Yeltsin, a Gorbachev ally turned critic, who won the special citywide seat for Moscow. Then, in 1990, the "leading role" of the CPSU was removed from the constitution and a separate USSR presidency established. Gorbachev wanted to separate party from state to make the latter more efficient, but he continued to be leader of both. He did not open up the presidency to democratic election, nor try to break the conservatives within the CPSU, and his lack of democratic credentials and firm power base would eventually prove fatal.

By the end of 1989, the Soviet satellites in eastern Europe turned Gorbachev's "New Thinking" and his slogan of a "Common European Home" into a new post-communist era. Soviet republics also gained greater autonomy – especially in the Caucasus and the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which were freed from the tsarist empire after 1918 but annexed anew by Stalin in 1944.

Yet the real sleeping giant was Russia itself, almost 80 per cent of the land area of the USSR and its principal banker. Yeltsin was now its leader, winning a landslide election victory in June 1991. Although an old-style party boss playing populist politics, he had the strong political base and democratic credentials that Gorbachev conspicuously lacked. That August's botched conservative coup only hastened the Union's now inevitable break-up. Its last rites in December 1991 included a referendum in which 92 per cent of Ukrainian voters opted for independence.

Gorbachev started an avalanche that he could not control. But as reform turned to revolution in 1989-91, he did not use force – except briefly in the Baltic in January 1991. So he stands in direct contrast with China's communist leaders in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, and even more so with Vladimir Putin's brutal bid in 2022 to reconquer Russia's lost empire. How Gorbachev will be remembered may very well depend on whether Ukraine can hold on to its independence and its territory.

David Reynolds is emeritus professor of international history at the University of Cambridge

DANA GLUCKSTEIN -MPTVIMAGES-EYEVINE

Accidental revolutionary?
Mikhail Gorbachev as seen in a 1995 portrait. His leadership saw the Soviet Union undergo dramatic reform, leading to its dissolution in 1991

Gorbachev and US president Ronald Reagan meet for the first time, in Geneva, 1985. The Soviet leader believed that diplomacy was key in helping him achieve his domestic goals

"Gorbachev's actions were particularly feted in Germany

KRISTINA SPOHR

Gorbachev's is a complex legacy, and how his achievements are judged depends on your vantage point. While he is slated by China for being an ideological sell-out and criticised by the Balts for blocking their efforts to restore their statehoods, in the west he has been revered for peacefully managing the end of the Cold War.

Through his actions, rooted in a mix of idealism and pragmatism, he was regarded as a peacemaker and peace-preserver at a time of revolutionary turmoil. He allowed new liberties at home, freedom of speech and freedom of conscience, and ultimately even tolerated self-determination inside the USSR – albeit at the cost of his job.

In all this, Gorbachev was the key agent of change. This is not to deny the significance of the global shifts that had been happening since the late 1970s – in military balance, the economy, technology, and the rising importance of people power. But it was Gorbachev who would bring about transformative change in European and global affairs.

To succeed at home, Gorbachev believed he needed to foster a stable international environment and address the USSR's "imperial overstretch". To this end, he negotiated nuclear and conventional arms reductions treaties with US presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. He granted autonomy to the governments of eastern and central Europe, helping lift the iron curtain that had divided the continent for more than 40 years.

One nation in which Gorbachev's actions were particularly feted was Germany. After the dramatic fall of the Berlin Wall, Gorbachev – who since the summer of 1989 had been met by ordinary East and West Germans' total Gorbymania – considered the issue of reunification as a natural course of history. Together with the leaders of both East and West Germany he had to confront several complex problems, including what would happen to the 380,000 Red Army soldiers stationed in East Germany and when and how the USSR would give up its Allied reserved rights over the nation.

Eventually, Gorbachev agreed to relinquish the USSR's rights as a Second World War victor and to grant the Germans their right to self-determination. It was agreed that a unified Germany should gain full sovereignty and would therefore be free to choose its alliance affiliation, which resulted in the new, larger Federal Republic remaining a Nato member. Special provisions and obligations for the former GDR territory were included in the text of the 1990 treaty that formally re-established German unity.

In return for his willingness to compromise on these points, German chancellor Helmut Kohl had granted Gorbachev, as part of their bilateral talks in the Caucasus that July, a financial package of around 80bn German marks in loans and economic aid, which would also finance the withdrawal of the Red Army, scheduled to be completed by 1994. Through mutual trust and a genuine desire to find compromise and jointly acceptable solutions, peace was finally made in the former cockpit of the Cold War. After the east European revolutions of 1989 and reaching a final settlement with Germany, by the autumn of 1990 Gorbachev was praised for ending the "empire by imposition".

Gorbachev believed in a gradual east-west rapprochement but, in reality, his reforms increasingly seemed more like Soviet catch-up with the west. The ultimate shift in 1990/91 from one-party state to political pluralism never worked, and the more the country descended into chaos, the more that Soviet international clout waned. Increasingly challenged by communist hardliners and more extreme liberalisers, the man who embraced radical change and refused to impose his will by authoritarian or coercive means wound up presiding over the destruction of his state. Gorbachev never got to the stage of truly reinventing the Soviet Union because, in the end, its people turned against its leader and the old communist suprastructure and simply walked out on what had been the USSR. That was his tragedy.

Gorbachev was, above all, no normal Russian leader. He opened the USSR to Europe and the world and made Russians freer than they had ever been. He failed to hold the Union together, but through his pacifist, values-based policies, he transcended old antagonisms and was able to foster real postwar reconciliation. Thanks to him, Russia's people could let their dreams of previously unimagined opportunities blossom in what was hoped would become a new, more peaceful post-Wall era.

Kristina Spohr is professor of international history at the London School of Economics

"Putin and other nationalists are correct that the Gorbachev era fatally weakened Russia

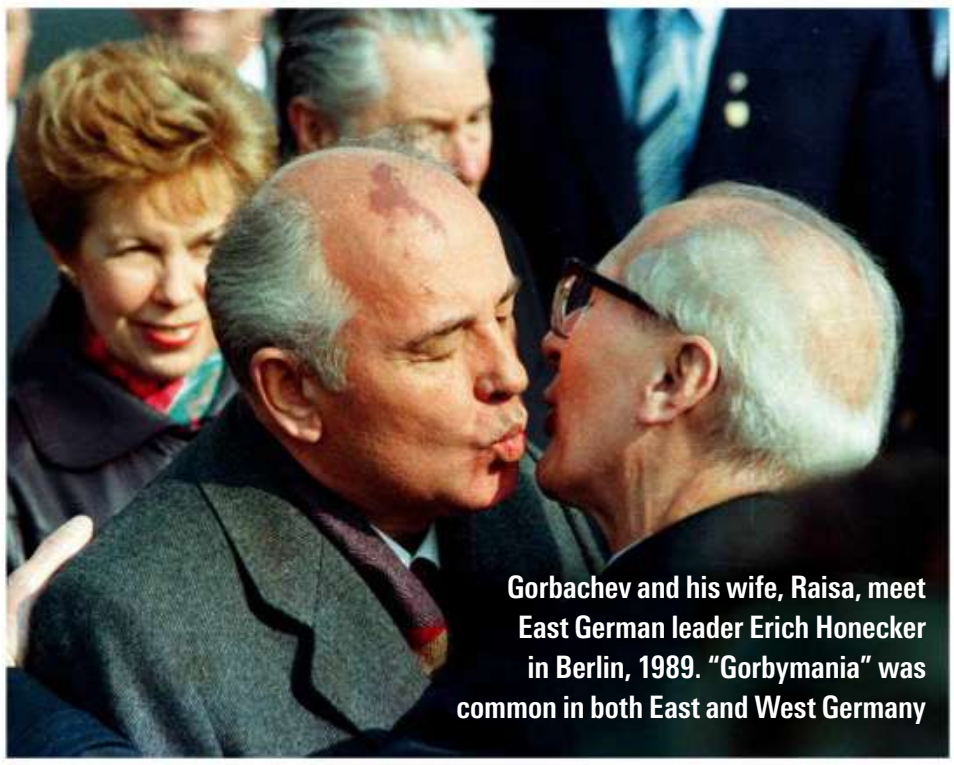
EVAN MAWDSLEY

Comments made in the west following Gorbachev's death have been highly favourable, if not altogether accurate. The former Soviet president has been credited with having brought down the communist regime, but that was not his actual intention, nor did he want the break-up of the multinational USSR.

He can with greater accuracy be credited with helping to bring about an end to the Cold War and an arms race that Russia could not win. As a realist, he also accepted

REUTERS

The summits that ended the Cold War
David Reynolds and Kristina Spohr chart the key meetings that led to peace: *historyextra.com/cold-war-summits*



Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, meet East German leader Erich Honecker in Berlin, 1989. "Gorbymania" was common in both East and West Germany

Officials in West Germany check goods coming from eastern Europe in May 1986, just weeks after the Chernobyl disaster. Its consequences sparked a protest movement against the USSR's poor environmental record

Supporters of Boris Yeltsin in 1991. The politician would go on to become president of Russia a few months later

REUTERS/GETTY IMAGES

that the influence of the USSR in neighbouring states, notably in Germany, could not be sustained. With that he brought about a profound change in European history.

Perceptions of Gorbachev in Russia are more critical. Current president Vladimir Putin has repeatedly condemned the actions of his predecessor and did not grant him a state funeral. It is more difficult to assess the perceptions of ordinary people in the former Soviet Union. Opinion polls there are unreliable, but it would be fair to say that Gorbachev nostalgia is not a mass phenomenon. His half-decade of reform was 30 to 35 years ago, meaning that even Russians in their fifties have little real memory of what was attempted then, let alone what the "old" USSR of communist leaders Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko was like.

Many inhabitants of the Russian Federation take a nationalist viewpoint, encouraged by a state-controlled news media which emphasises dangers from the US and its European allies. Many blame Gorbachev for the economic hardships of the 1990s, although these had less to do with him than with the inherent problems of the Soviet command economy created more than 55 years earlier. Inhabitants of the former Soviet "republics", especially in the Baltic States, Transcaucasia, and Ukraine, might be grateful for the preconditions which led to their becoming sovereign states, but there is a general realisation that this independence was not part of Gorbachev's agenda.

A second key aspect is the legacy for Russia of Gorbachev and his political approach. His actions, intentionally or otherwise, brought a fundamental break in its history. The failure of Gorbachev's perestroika demonstrated the difficulties of achieving a transition to what he and other Soviet reformers of the late 1980s thought of as a "normal, modern country". And Putin and other nationalists are correct that the Gorbachev era fatally weakened Russia as a great power, demographically, militarily, and economically – something which is evident today on the battlefields of Ukraine.

On the other hand, it may well be that, given the disastrous failure of Putin's current military adventure in Ukraine – coinciding as it does with Gorbachev's death – the era of the later 1980s may still give some sense that a better alternative exists. H

Evan Mawdsley is a professorial research fellow at the University of Glasgow

LETTERS

Margaret of Anjou was one of England's most determined queens, says Richard Cole

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Within these walls

The story of a bricklayer placing a pound coin in the wall of a reader's home (*Letters*, October) is an example of centuries-old apotropaic magic – intended to deter evil spirits. It's exemplified in everyday actions such as crossing fingers and knocking on wood, or in displaying or secreting items.

In ancient Rome, human and animal bones or pots of food and drink were used as foundation sacrifices. Horseshoes nailed above doorways are still common sights.

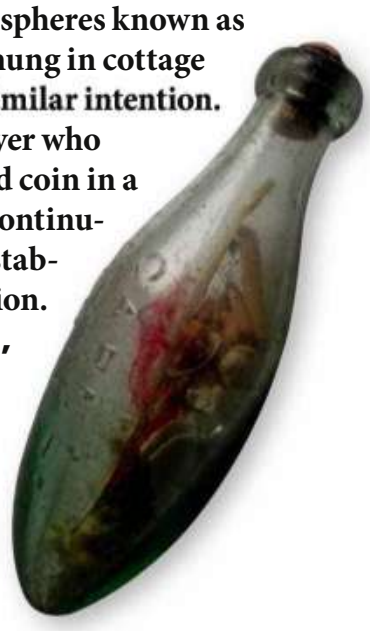
In 2016, a man's shoe was found within a wall in St John's College, Cambridge; it's thought to have been placed there as a lucky charm in the 17th or 18th century. Northampton Museum has an index of almost 3,000 shoes discovered in old buildings near entrance points such as doors, windows and fireplaces. One theory is the shoes were intended as bait, meant to attract witches by their scent and then trap them. More positively, in past eras shoes might be thrown at newly wed couples to wish them happiness and fertility, in the same way as rice and confetti are thrown today.

Occasionally, dead bodies of cats were placed inside walls to deter intruding vermin. These have been discovered in New England as well as in Europe.

Meanwhile, "witch bottles" [pictured below] have been found in old buildings and churchyards, and beside rivers. The idea was to capture a witch inside a bottle containing needles and wine, to impale and drown her. Glass spheres known as witch balls were hung in cottage windows with a similar intention.

So the bricklayer who placed that pound coin in a wall was simply continuing a very long-established folk tradition.

Ian MacDonald, Essex



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Personality and Power** by Ian Kershaw.
You can read our review on page 78

The power behind Henry's throne

Lauren Johnson's article (*Henry V's Fatal Legacy*, September) was of timely interest to me. I'm currently reading Alison Weir's *Lancaster & York,* and recently reached the point at which Henry VI's sad reign is about to come to its second and final end. Henry is a fascinating character: pious but occasionally vindictive, and eschewing war at a time when it was seen as a fundamental of kingship.

What is most fascinating about Henry VI is not that he was overthrown but the lengths to which people went to restore his crown, and for how long they did so. This man – so clearly unfit to be king – was the beneficiary of countless plots and coups intended to put him back on the throne, even when he had lost all strongholds and possessed no army or money.

His wife, the irrepressible Margaret of Anjou, must be regarded as one of the strongest, most determined and most powerful queens that this country ever had. The lengths that she went to in order protect the rights of her husband and son are beyond impressive.

The story of her attempts to achieve Henry's restoration during his years of exile and hiding are worthy of greater awareness. These included negotiations with figures such as the French king, the dukes of Burgundy and even the Earl of Warwick, her greatest enemy apart from Edward IV. She was a true proponent of the saying: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

She was relentless in her drive and belief that she could overcome the odds and permanently restore Henry – and in 1470, she nearly achieved it.

Richard Cole, Whitley Bay

Floating reformatory

Though I am in no position to disagree with the statement that prison hulks were discontinued in 1857 (*Floating Hell*, October), I'd like to offer an observation about reformatories and industrial schools.

In the mid-20th century, Liverpool City Council Children's Department administered an approved school, Greystone Heath. In the main hallway was a trophy cabinet containing several shields and cups presented to reformatories moored on the river Mersey. These were in appreciation of work undertaken by boys from these reformatories in local chemical factories during the First World War.

To the best of my knowledge, these establishments were formerly Royal Naval vessels, constructed of wood. Though I cannot be certain, it is possible that one of them may have been the *Clarence*, which in 1864 was developed as a reformatory and was certainly based on the Mersey.

Reform and industrial schools had a chequered history dating back to the Dickensian era. They were administered mainly by charities under the auspices of the Home Office. With the passing of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, the best of these establishments became known as approved schools, the purpose of which was to accept children who had been committed by criminal courts for custodial care and education.

I'd suggest, therefore, that prison hulks were still in existence in 1914 – maybe not as adult prisons, but used for a similar purpose for children and young persons.

PK Allen, North Yorkshire

Saintly Scot

Janina Ramirez (*Medieval Trailblazers*, September) omitted from her article a very well-qualified historical British woman: Queen Margaret of Scotland (c1045–93), later canonised as St Margaret, who married Malcolm III and was revered for her good works in the 11th century. Her chapel, built in Edinburgh Castle by one of the three sons who succeeded her husband, is the oldest surviving building in the Scottish capital.

Perhaps she could feature in a future article in *BBC History Magazine*. We do not get enough Scottish history!

Jenny Martin, Edinburgh

Past master

I concur with Tony Pitman's observation (*Letters*, September) that the late Alan Sorrell had a lasting influence on how the message of history could be conveyed through his lavish illustrations, such as that of Hadrian's Wall. His charcoal sketches had a quality that drew the reader in, held their attention, and enhanced their understanding of words – as in HH Scullard's excellent 1979 book, *Roman Britain – Outpost of the Empire*.

MALCOLM LIDBURY CREATIVE COMMONS/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

The Mobile Press Register

5,000 Hunt For Missing British Diplomats

Fears Rise That Missing Diplomats From London May Have Been Seized

Jackie Alexander found many modern parallels in this newspaper front page from more than 70 years ago

St Margaret's Chapel in Edinburgh Castle, the Scottish capital's oldest standing building. That saintly 11th-century queen deserves to be featured in a *BBC History Magazine* article, writes Jenny Martin

We now enjoy the benefits of digital graphics, but an illustration created through human labour – such as those from the pen, ink and charcoal of Sorrell – remains a unique way of conveying a vision of the past, and lasts much longer in the minds of those who grew up in the 1970s and 80s!
Rev Fr John McCallion, Co Tyrone

History repeating

On perusing the *Anniversaries* section of the February 2022 issue, I was struck by the photo of the June 1951 newspaper illustrating a story about Soviet spies [shown below left].

Three of the other headlines in the photo referred to stories that sound familiar today. One reports company executives getting large payouts and bonuses ("GM President Receives Pay of $626,100"). Another predicts "Beefless Menus and Meat Lines" caused by supply shortages. And a third tells of "Weeks of Drouth [sic] Blistering Crops… Heavy Damage Expected Unless Much-Needed Rains Fall Soon". There are also reports of war (in Korea).

Is this history repeating itself – or do some things never change?
Jackie Alexander, Eastbourne

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Vol 23 No 11 – November 2022
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A typical medieval peasant?

There's

Labouring the point
This scene from the *Luttrell Psalter*, a richly illuminated manuscript from c1330, gives an idealised insight into everyday life in 14th-century rural England

If modern film and TV depictions are anything to go by, ordinary people in the Middle Ages either enjoyed lives of rural bliss or unrelenting drudgery. Yet, writes **Duncan Hardy**, the truth is far more complex (and fascinating) than that

no such thing

TOPFOTO

Sheep may safely graze A French manuscript illumination, c1250, shows a bucolic scene in which a young shepherd plays his pipe and bell. Such idealised portrayals have contributed to a popular romanticised vision of medieval peasant life

Judging by most film and TV depictions of Europe in the Middle Ages, one peasant looked much like another. A face, probably grubby, peeks out from beneath a hood; below, the body is clad in a tunic and woollen hose. Shoes – if feet are shod at all – are spattered with mud, from the farmyard or the quagmire of a road along which they're tramping. Such was the lot of the ordinary man or woman.

Whether in Britain or Brittany, Essex or Aachen, a common assumption is that the everyday lives of ordinary medieval people were fairly homogeneous – that their status, wealth, health, diet and, yes, clothing was largely the same across much of the continent. Yet even a brief look at records and chronicles from that period – which, of course, covers a vast timespan – gives the lie to that idea.

Take the denizens of Ruislip, now a district in west London. In 1246, it was a small farming community in Middlesex. Here lived Roise, the miller's wife; Nicholas Brakespear, a freeholder who flouted the local authorities' orders; and Hugh Tree, whose flock kept getting into the lord's garden. If you wandered through 13th-century Ruislip, you might also meet brewers such as Alice, the widow of Salvage; or Agnotta, the amica ("friend", or mistress) of the shepherd.

Some locals were richer than others. One, Roger Hamo, was sufficiently wealthy that he could afford to pay 20 shillings for a jury of 12 local men to investigate his rights to a plot of land claimed by another man, Gilbert Bisuthe. The authorities' specification that some peasants, such as Nicholas Brakespear, were freeholders implies that others were tenants or serfs. Some people got along, but others got caught up in disputes – take William Slipper and the Widow Druet, for example, who argued over a hedge boundary between their properties.

We know about the lives of these people because they were mentioned in the court records of Bec Abbey in Normandy, which was the lord of Ruislip's manor. A document prepared by officials records information about justice administered to inhabitants of the manor on "Tuesday after Ascension Day [22 May]" 1246, including Roise, Nicholas, Agnotta and the others. Today they would all be lumped together as "peasants" – though this snapshot of one community at one moment in time reveals that generic label encompassed a range of people with quite different statuses and life experiences.

Apart from the fascinating stories of its various inhabitants, then, Ruislip's records tell us something important about medieval peasants: that their lives could be surprisingly varied.

Stereotypes on screen

All this should warn us against generalising about medieval peasants – yet, unfortunately, this is a warning that we, in the modern world, have failed to heed. In fact, so strong has been this urge to package our ancestors into stereotypes that we have fallen into the trap of visualising medieval peasant life in two ways. There is the "negative" vision, that peasants in medieval Europe (our stereotypes tend to derive from the Latin Christian west) lived short, miserable lives. In this depiction, they were not only afflicted by the widespread disease and lack of hygiene that we associate with all pre-modern people, but were also violently oppressed by a greedy clergy and nobility. Other modern imaginations have drawn a different picture: of a utopian conception of contented medieval peasants liberated from the constraints of constant regimented work, with autonomy for themselves and their communities.

This snapshot of one community at one moment in time reveals people with quite different life experiences

Such views are based largely on depictions of ordinary people on television and film. Most films set in the Middle Ages treat peasants as mere window dressing: a powerless, servile mass. Extras with dirt on their faces pose in crowd scenes while the real protagonists – royals, nobles and clergy – drive the plot forward. Where peasants have a role, it is often because they have joined a noble, military milieu: Milla Jovovich's titular character in *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999), for example, or Heath Ledger's fictional peasant-turned-jouster in *A Knight's Tale* (2001).

Even more commonly, peasants are nameless and incompetent, reinforcing their inferiority to high-ranking main characters. Thus in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), the crusading nobleman Balian of Ibelin, played by Orlando Bloom, teaches starving Levantine peasants how to irrigate their lands – in reality, that technology had already existed in the Middle East for thousands of years.

A few films have, by contrast, portrayed peasants as heroic freedom fighters in a good-versus-evil struggle with corrupt overlords. Take *Robin Hood: Prince of*

TOPFOTO

Thieves (1991), or *Braveheart* (1995), which depicts the main protagonist, William Wallace (Mel Gibson), as a "commoner" and a man of the people; in fact, he was a member of the lower nobility.

There is little room for nuance in such narratives: they are binary affairs pitting the masses against the aristocracy without intermediate social gradations. In *Braveheart*, for instance, even the Scottish nobles ostensibly on Wallace's side betray him, whereas the common folk rally around his cause. Such stories really reflect an abiding modern concern – inequalities between distant, dishonest elites and down-to-earth "ordinary people" – but also contribute to the romanticisation of medieval peasants.

Comedies have perhaps come closest to reflecting on the place of peasants in medieval society itself. Consider the 1975 classic film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, specifically the exchange between King Arthur (Graham Chapman) and two peasants (Michael Palin and Terry Jones). The peasants' assertion that they are "an anarcho-syndicalist commune" is partly a satire of modern leftist organisations. However, the reaction of Palin's character when Arthur seizes him and tries to silence him – "Now we see the violence inherent in the system!" – is the most trenchant summary of lord-peasant relations in modern cinema.

Violent, backward and servile

Like most stereotypes, modern views of peasant life are not entirely baseless. However, they tell us more about ourselves as modern inhabitants of an industrial civilisation than they do about the Middle Ages.

Since the Enlightenment, people in the "west" have tended to view themselves as superior to all who came before. In that respect, the "medieval" functions as the antithesis of all that we flatter ourselves as being. We regard ourselves as civilised, rational, technologically advanced, free and egalitarian. By contrast, "medieval people" – above all, peasants – must have been violent, superstitious, backward and servile.

The opposite fantasy – that medieval peasants lived idyllic lives – is rooted in the alienation many modern people have felt since the industrial revolution. To such people, the Middle Ages represent a romantic alternative to the corruption of modernity: it was a time when people lived more authentic lives, were more in touch with nature, and enjoyed stronger communities, undisrupted by the frenetic demands of modern capitalism. Hence recent opinion pieces, which gained huge traction on social media, claiming that medieval peasants enjoyed more holidays and leisure time than 21st-century western workers.

A barrel of laughs?
A detail from the c1225–50 *Lewis Psalter* shows peasants brewing ale. The idea that medieval workers enjoyed idyllic lives is a modern fantasy, writes Duncan Hardy

These two narratives, being products of modern preoccupations, are of limited use in illuminating the lives of people who lived in what we now term the Middle Ages – roughly, the early sixth to 16th centuries. The length of that timespan – a millennium – should provide one clue about the limits of any generalisations made about it. Even if we focus only on Europe, we're dealing with a panoply of different geographies, climates and regimes of lordship that evolved over 10 centuries, resulting in an array of peasant experiences. And finally, as Ruislip shows, even in one specific location the people we group together under the label "peasants" could be diverse in terms of gender, wealth, free or unfree status, and so on.

Struggle for freedom

In light of this, can we say anything specific and meaningful about medieval European "peasant" experiences? We can certainly point to some shared patterns in the Latin Christian heartlands during key phases of the Middle Ages. In the early medieval period, the political structures of the Roman empire crumbled in western Europe, but its successor states under the Frankish kings and their neighbours perpetuated some Roman ideas and practices. One was the distinction between free individuals and slaves or serfs (*servi* or *mancipia*), with the latter experiencing various restrictions on their personal, judicial and economic rights. Precise forms of unfreedom changed over time, but important differences in legal status remained in most places in medieval Europe.

Those peasants fortunate enough to be of free status probably experienced a period of relative independence in the immediate post-Roman centuries. The urban centres of the former empire shrank everywhere, and the power of landlords dwindled, while local settlements gained substantial autonomy. Sources for rural life are rare for the sixth to eighth centuries, but those we do have suggest that free peasants enjoyed less pressure from exploitative landlords than at any other time in medieval history.

The power structure of various aristocratic and clerical elites, which depended on extracting surplus wealth from peasant production, became more complex and onerous during the Carolingian period that reached its zenith under Charlemagne, King of the Franks from AD 768 and Emperor of the Romans, 800–814. In that period, dukes and duchesses, counts and countesses, bishops and monasteries received grants of vast estates and attendant rights over their inhabitants from the powerful Carolingian court. Surviving sources show these landlords trying to exercise more control over the peasantry in their lands.

For instance, around 868 a mother and daughter, Cotefrida and Hungund – both free women – transferred their lands to the mighty Carolingian monastery of Saint-Gall, and obtained them back as tenures. There was a reciprocity implicit in this new relationship – they were now considered to be under the monastery's protection – but this certainly curtailed their personal freedoms and uses of their land.

Such arrangements began to blur the previously sharp distinction between free and unfree status among peasants. This blurring accelerated after the Carolingian empire gave way to smaller kingdoms during the so-called "High" Middle Ages (950–1300). Most historians agree that this period saw a localisation and privatisation of power into the hands of small-scale, violent lords in what has sometimes been called the "feudal transformation". In Europe's core regions – including much of England, France, the Low Countries, western Germany and northern Italy – peasants found themselves living

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

Comic capers
Michael Palin plays a peasant in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, a 1975 film satirising both medieval and modern societies

Class conflict The Jacquerie uprising is brutally put down in the town of Meaux, as depicted in a 15th-century manuscript of Jean Froissart's 14th-century *Chronicles*. This popular revolt, which swept across northern France in 1358, saw peasants professing their desire to destroy the nobility, but ultimately thousands of commoners died in the reprisals that followed the Jacquerie's suppression

Was the peasants' revolt really led by peasants? Helen Carr discussed the 1381 uprising on the HistoryExtra podcast: *historyextra.com/peasants-revolt-podcast*

under lords who controlled most aspects of their lives. That included aspects that had previously been publicly managed, such as village law courts. Lords increasingly extracted labour dues as well as rents, even from their tenant farmers who were not serfs.

Rebels and radicals

Beyond this densely populated core, however, peasant life could be much freer. A population boom in these centuries prompted outward migration, and conquests on Latin Christendom's frontiers – from Iberia to eastern Europe – encouraged the conquerors to offer favourable conditions to migrating peasants, often at the expense of existing populations. In 1159, for example, Archbishop Wichmann of Magdeburg in eastern Germany attracted one Herbert to settle in the nearby village of Pechau with a promise of six hereditary holdings, no labour obligations, and a judicial office from which Herbert could derive one-third of the profits.

The final phase of the Middle Ages – from the 14th to the early 16th centuries – is the best documented, shedding light on the diversity of life at every level of society, including that of peasant men and women. Famines and repeated pandemics – including the devastating Black Death of 1347–51 – caused misery and demographic decline, but their impacts were mixed and depended on local circumstances.

In much of western Europe, especially England and France, serfdom disappeared in the late medieval period, though some poorer peasants still lived very precarious lives as penniless tenants or owners of dwindling smallholdings. East-central European regions such as Prussia and Poland, by contrast, experienced a "second serfdom": the nobility imposed stricter controls over the peasantry than ever before. Meanwhile, other areas, such as Dithmarschen on the Danish-German border and Appenzell in what is now Switzerland, became self-governing peasant "republics" using force to repel would-be coercive overlords.

An assembly of villagers asserted that it would be good if all the knights and squires of France were destroyed

Plentiful evidence from the late Middle Ages also shows that peasants were not passive victims of the biological, economic and political hardships that they faced. Whether in law courts or, occasionally, through armed rebellions, peasants actively sought to navigate these difficult circumstances to their own advantage. Outright revolts became increasingly common, with different groups rising up for different reasons – another reminder of the sheer variety of "peasant" experiences. Famous examples include the Jacquerie in northern France in 1358, the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, and Jack Cade's Rebellion in Kent in 1450. All of these not only involved protest against taxes and landlords' impositions, but also saw spokespeople representing the peasants using prevailing discourses about the "common good" of the realm.

It is in the context of these revolts that we can get closest to hearing medieval peasant voices, some of whom said quite radical things. In his 14th-century *Chronicles*, Jean Froissart recounts how, at the outbreak of the Jacquerie revolt, an assembly of villagers asserted that "all of the nobility of the realm of France, knights and squires, were betraying the realm, and that it would be a very good thing if all of them were destroyed".

And in England, according to the chronicler Thomas Walsingham, when the priest John Ball gave a sermon to peasants who assembled at Blackheath in 1381, he voiced their opposition to serfdom with the famous words: "Whan Adam dalf, and Even span, Wo was thanne a gentilman?" [When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then a gentleman?]

Shedding noble blood

For some peasant rebels, religious concerns were even more central. In early 15th-century Bohemia, for example, the Hussite movement that broke away from the Catholic church included peasant adherents who formed the backbone of armies that repelled multiple crusades. And a century later, in the 1520s, the early Reformation coincided with Europe's largest revolt – the so-called Peasants' War of 1524–25 – in which bands of farmers across the southern and central Holy Roman Empire took up arms against their princely overlords.

Although that latter movement was brutally crushed, it briefly produced a flurry of radical publications. One, *The Twelve Articles of the Peasantry*, combined peasants' grievances against landlords with religious teachings, most profoundly in an article calling for the abolition of serfdom: "It has been customary until now to hold us as bondspeople, which is to be deplored, as Christ redeemed and purchased us all with the precious shedding of his blood, the shepherd as much as the highest noble."

Such late medieval texts allow us to glimpse peasants as they always were throughout the Middle Ages, across all kinds of geographic, political and social contexts: diverse three-dimensional actors with their own ideas and agendas. We should neither romanticise them nor write them off as an undifferentiated mass of abject lower orders, but respect them as complex and fully rounded historical agents. And we should seek to capture the echoes of their voices in our fragmentary source material wherever we can. H

TOPFOTO

Pulling rank
Peasants pay taxes in a 15th-century woodcut. Across much of eastern Europe, the aristocracy exerted a vice-like control over peasants into the late Middle Ages and beyond

Duncan Hardy is associate professor of history at the University of Central Florida, specialising in medieval and early modern Europe

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Up for the flight
Colditz captives including (third left) the famous escapee Pat Reid. The camp "developed its own culture of defiance", says Ben Macintyre

"The reality of Colditz is much more interesting than the black-and-white moral fable"

For his new book, bestselling author **Ben Macintyre** has set his sights on the most infamous PoW camp of the Second World War. He reveals how the legendary escape attempts are only part of a complex, darker history

INTERVIEW BY **ROB ATTAR**

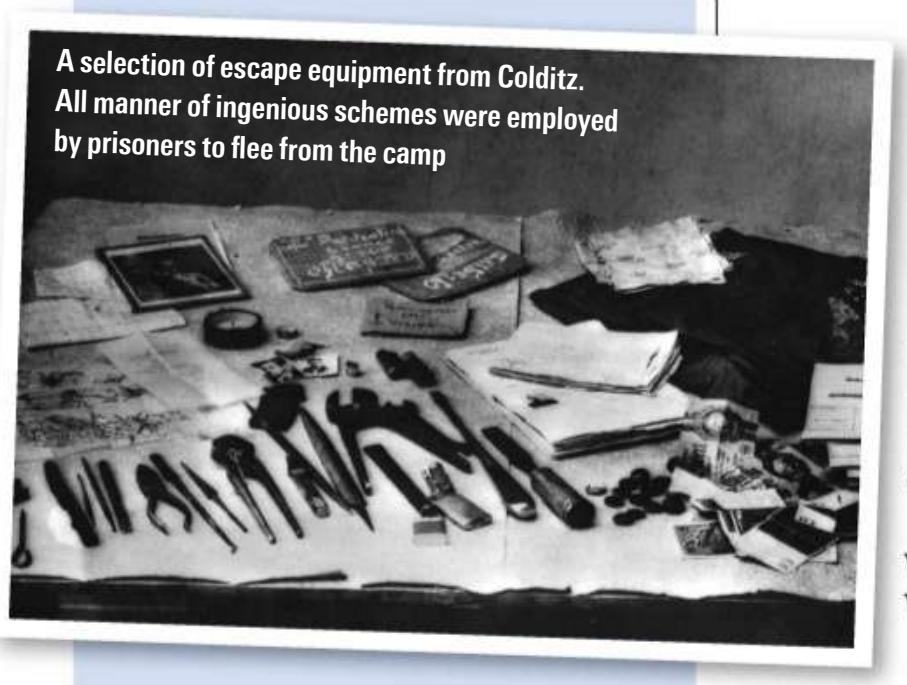
ALAMY

IN CONTEXT

Early in the Second World War, the **medieval Colditz Castle** was converted into a **prisoner of war camp**, intended to hold those Allied officers deemed most likely to escape or cause trouble for their German army captors.

Colditz remained in use until its liberation by US forces in April 1945 and at its peak held **more than 800 PoWs**, composed of many different nationalities and including famous names such as SAS founder David Stirling, future politician Airey Neave and RAF hero Douglas Bader. Although the castle was said to be "escape-proof", more escape attempts took place at Colditz than any other PoW camp. Altogether **more than 130 men broke out of the castle**, though little more than 30 successfully made it all the way across the German border.

These often ingenious escape attempts – popularised in books, TV and a highly successful 1973 board game – are what Colditz is best known for today. But there were many **darker aspects of the camp's history** including racism, class divisions and mental breakdowns.



A selection of escape equipment from Colditz. All manner of ingenious schemes were employed by prisoners to flee from the camp

In your new book you discuss a myth of Colditz that needs to be challenged. What is this myth and how did it come about?
Those of us of a certain age grew up with the great BBC TV series about Colditz and, also, in my case, the board game *Escape from Colditz*. So Colditz was steeped into our childhoods, but often the story followed a very particular pattern. It was brave British men outwitting the Germans and tunnelling out of this vast Gothic castle in a way that continued the war by other means. It dignified the whole prisoner-of-war experience as an extension of a gallant, rather old-fashioned war. And of course, that is true of Colditz, but only partly so.

Like all myths, the reality is much more complicated and much more interesting than the black-and-white moral fable we've inherited. There were acts of extraordinary courage and resilience. But there was also a whole other set of behaviours. Colditz was a crucible for the most amazing variety of human responses to circumstances that were beyond their control.

What kind of vision did the prisoners encounter when they arrived at Colditz?
A pretty terrifying one. It's a vast, 700-room Gothic *schloss* on top of a cliff, overlooking the town of Colditz: a very dominating, domineering piece of architecture. The castle was built in the 11th century by the electors of Saxony, effectively as a demonstration of power. And it was also used, from its very earliest times, to incarcerate people who did not fit in with the existing power regime. Over the years, it had been a psychiatric hospital, a prison, a place where the electors would put their unwanted and dangerous siblings. So it's always had a history of being somewhere people were held against their will.

What kind of prisoners were sent to Colditz?
They were the most difficult prisoners: people who had demonstrated, in other camps, that they were going to try to escape, and going to make trouble. The German idea was to herd all these troublemakers together in one place, in a castle that would be impossible to escape from.

But there were two problems with that. One was that Colditz, while very impressive to look at, was full of holes and actually not a very good place to have a security camp. And the second problem was that if you put a lot of naughty boys together, they egg each other on and pretty soon, your house is on fire. This is what happened at Colditz: it developed its own culture of defiance.

One other thing to say is that this was an officers' camp, which gave it a particular kind of status because, under the Geneva Convention, officers were treated better than ordinary soldiers. And, again under the Geneva Convention, these imprisoned officers had ordinary soldiers, orderlies, to look after them: to polish their shoes, to make their food, to bring up their bathwater. So right through the middle of Colditz was this unbridgeable social division between the officers who made up the majority, and the orderlies who were under their command and not allowed to escape.

As well as different classes at Colditz there were also multiple nationalities. How did they get on with each other?
Sometimes very well, sometimes in a sort of rivalry. What you had there were Polish, French, Belgian, Dutch, British and, latterly, American prisoners. They were all allies, technically, but like all allies, they didn't always get on terribly well. During the initial period in Colditz, the PoWs from different nations were actually tripping up over each other's attempts to escape, so they established an international escape committee which sort of worked.

I loved looking at the ways the different nations interacted. Believe it or not, they had an "Olympic Games" at Colditz in August 1941, which brought out, as one of the observers said, all the sorts of national stereotypes you could wish for: the Poles very focused and wanting to win, the French being very laidback about it all, the Brits just not caring and laughing at everybody.

There were also several Jewish prisoners at Colditz. How were they and other racial minorities treated?
There's a racial story within Colditz, which has never been properly told before. Quite early on, the French officers insisted that they would not be billeted with the Jewish-French officers. It was a very shocking moment. You have to bear in mind that at this point the collaborationist Vichy government was operating in southern France, and quite a few of the prisoners were very pro-Vichy, and

IWM/TOPFOTO

Home entertainment Games of volleyball were one way that Allied PoWs passed the long days at Colditz, along with music, drama and social clubs

some were clearly extremely anti-Semitic. The Germans, of course, saw this as a propaganda opportunity and immediately herded the French-Jewish prisoners – of whom there were about 60 or 70 – into a special barrack in the attics. It was much smaller and more uncomfortable, and was immediately called the ghetto. Some of the British were absolutely scandalised that this could happen and that the Germans allowed it to go ahead.

One other story that leapt out at me is that of the only non-white British officer in Colditz, an Indian doctor called Birendranath Mazumdar who was in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He had been told that he was not allowed to escape because of the colour of his skin – on the grounds that he would be picked up immediately. He went on hunger strike and insisted he be moved to an all-Indian prison, of which there were very few. The one he ended up in was in occupied France and from there he managed to escape and walk 700 miles across the border into Switzerland.

Mazumdar suffered the most terrible racism at Colditz, not really from the Germans but from the British. He was treated as a second-class citizen, and that's very hard to write, but it's important to know that there is this race story within the Colditz narrative.

Stand-out story
The Indian doctor Birendranath Mazumdar (right) was the only non-white British officer in Colditz. He was moved to a camp in France, from which he would escape

"The Germans herded the French-Jewish prisoners into a special barrack in the attics, which was much smaller and more uncomfortable"

In general, how well treated were the PoWs by their German guards?
Colditz was run by the German army. It wasn't a concentration camp and these weren't SS fanatics – they were professional soldiers, who went out of their way to observe the rules of the Geneva Convention. On the whole, they tended to treat the prisoners as officers and gentlemen and the prisoners expected to be treated that way.

That said, if the PoWs were escaping, they could be shot at – it's not as if it was without danger. And among the German contingent were some pretty grotesque Nazi fanatics, though not very many. But again, this illustrates the point I'm making that there was a huge variety of human nature inside this theatre.

And on the other side, how did the prisoners view their captors?
It depended on the individual. Some got on with them well, but there were also moments of deep antagonism and direct confrontation. One of the ways that the British contingent, particularly, dealt with the boredom and frustration of this long imprisonment was "goon-baiting". "Goon" was a slang term for the German guards, and a huge amount of ingenuity went into this activity: teasing them, mocking them, whistling on parade, refusing to stand up straight – anything the prisoners could do to drive them mad.

It was very puerile and came from an English public-school tradition of ragging the masters. But it allowed the prisoners to let off steam in a way that was extraordinarily therapeutic. My favourite story is when the prisoners discovered a wasps' nest in one of the walls and spent weeks catching wasps, putting them in matchboxes and very carefully attaching cigarette papers onto their legs on which was written, "Deutschland kaput".

STAATLICHE SCHLÖSSER, BURGEN UND GÄRTEN SACHSEN GGMBH, SCHLOSS COLDITZ/TOPFOTO

How tough was captivity in Colditz?
Listen to more of our interview with Ben Macintyre about the infamous camp: *historyextra.com/colditz*

Then one day in the early-morning parade, on a signal, they all opened these matchboxes and hundreds of very angry wasps carrying anti-German propaganda rose into the sky above Colditz and presumably went on to sting and inform many people around the countryside of what the PoWs felt inside Colditz.

The camp is best known for the myriad escape attempts that took place. Was Colditz home to an unusual number of such attempts?
Yes it was. There were more attempts to escape from Colditz than any other prison. But escaping from the camp itself was only half the battle. Once you were out, you had to then get out of Germany, which in many ways was much harder.

I discovered that there were fewer escape attempts than I had thought, and certainly fewer successful ones. The Germans gradually made it more difficult to get out and security was increased. By the end of 1944, very few prisoners were still trying to escape, it had become far too dangerous. So the story of everybody trying to escape all the time isn't quite right. Everybody was prepared to contribute to escape attempts, but the hardened escapers were a minority.

Did any of the escape attempts particularly stand out to you?
The most famous was the escape of Airey Neave, who would become one of Margaret Thatcher's senior advisors later in his career.

There was a space beneath the floor of the theatre in Colditz, and they worked out that they could get into the floor and from there access a tunnel that ran across one of the arches and ended with a locked door into the German guard room.

One night, Neave and an accomplice got themselves through the theatre floor, went along this corridor, unpicked the lock into the German guard house and strode out of the front door wearing fake German uniforms – they had managed to produce replicas that were virtually identical to the real thing. They walked across the moat, down a little path, past the barracks, and climbed over the wall and got out. It was an astonishing escape, incredibly brazen. [Neave and his accomplice made it safely to Switzerland and he returned to England via France, Spain and Gibraltar].

Another one I particularly liked was by a French aristocrat called Pierre Mairesse-Lebrun, who was a cavalry officer. He got an accomplice to help him vault over the wire enclosure that surrounded the exercise yard. He did a sort of cartwheel on the top, and landed beautifully on the other side, like a thoroughbred taking a steeplechase fence. Lebrun then ran up the hill, while being shot at by the guards, climbed over the wall, walked about 70 miles to the nearest station, stole a bicycle, then cycled along the autobahn and miraculously managed to smuggle himself across the border into Switzerland.

Leap to freedom The French aristocrat and cavalry officer Pierre Mairesse-Lebrun pulled off one of the most athletic escapes in Colditz history

Dramatic lives One of the many theatrical productions put on by the Allied PoWs to alleviate the sheer boredom of being held in captivity

These stories are extraordinary, but do they obscure the fact that, for many, Colditz was a place of extreme boredom?
That's a good point. Most war stories are about the moments of colour and adventure, yet most of life inside Colditz was unbelievably boring; nothing was happening. Because they were officers, the prisoners were not allowed to work and had nothing to do. They responded to this in a huge variety of ways. Some, as I say, took to goon-baiting, some became obsessed by escaping. But quite a lot of them retreated into literature or took correspondence courses.

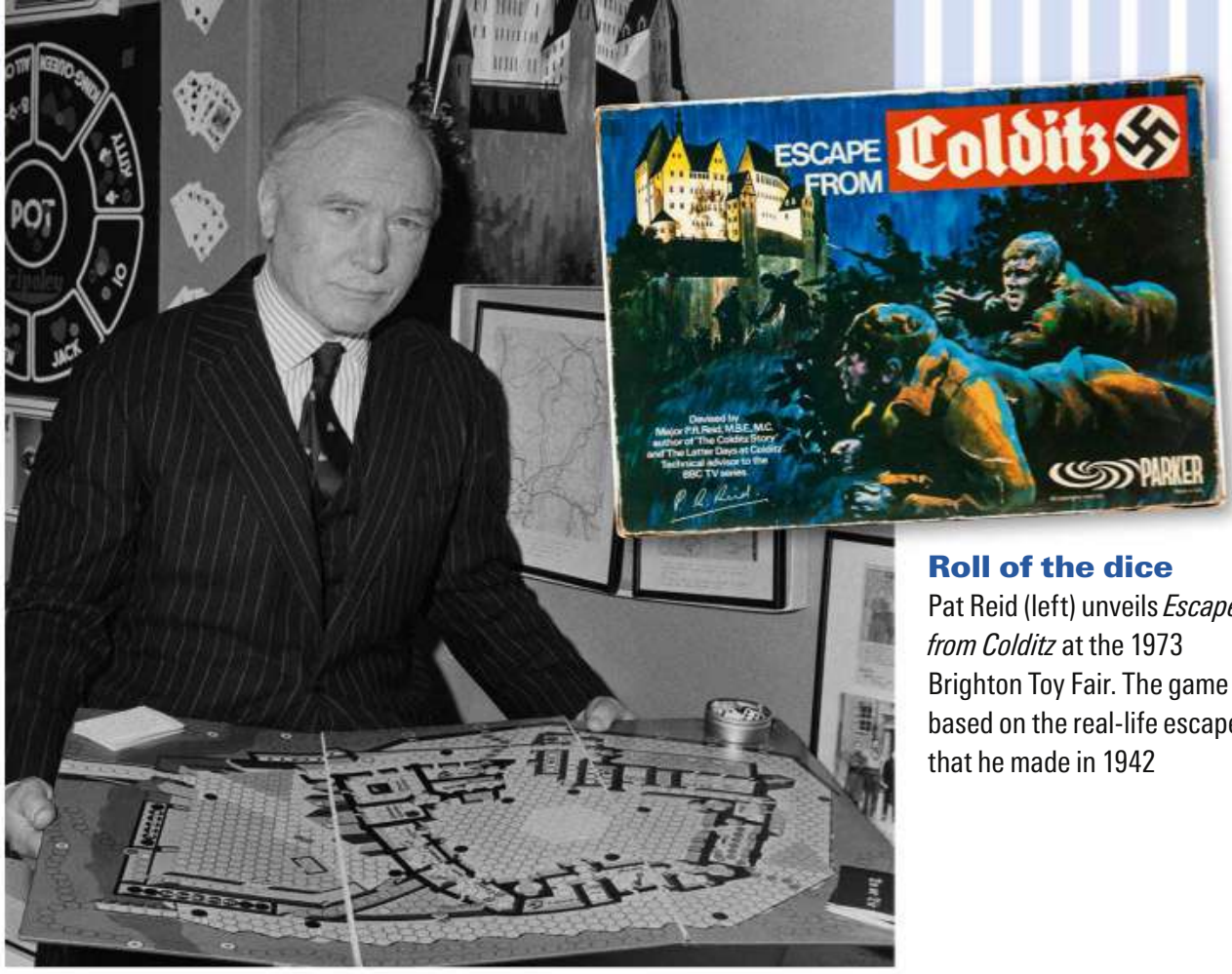
> **"The PoWs opened the matchboxes and hundreds of angry wasps carrying anti-German propaganda rose into the sky above Colditz"**

Drama also played a huge part in Colditz and the theatre became a focal point. There was a new production every few days and they were packed out; the Germans would come too. The PoWs put on dozens of different productions: plays, revues, pantomimes, skits, and a lot of musical stuff as well. There were orchestras in Colditz, there were chamber groups, there was a Hawaiian string band, there was a Polish choir. It was another form of escapism, without actually escaping.

The British also began to set up clubs: bridge, chess, sports clubs, but also the social clubs that were so much a part of prewar British culture. Believe it or not, there was a Bullingdon Club in Colditz – exclusively for those who had belonged to the Bullingdon Club at the University of Oxford.

At Colditz there were also some celebrity hostages. How differently were they treated to the regular prisoners?
This is another extraordinary story. They were called the *Prominente*, the prominent ones, and they were individual prisoners

PUBLIC DOMAIN/BOURNEMOUTH NEWS AND PICTURE SERVICE



Roll of the dice
Pat Reid (left) unveils *Escape from Colditz* at the 1973 Brighton Toy Fair. The game is based on the real-life escape that he made in 1942

whom the Nazi high command had decided were of particular value. The first was Winston Churchill's nephew, Giles Romilly, who was a journalist and had been captured in Norway. He was later joined by two nephews of the king; a man called Michael Alexander, who pretended to be the nephew of General Alexander [British commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean theatre]; and the son of the American ambassador.

Hitler and his entourage had convinced themselves that these characters would be useful bargaining tools, who could either be swapped or threatened. They were treated differently with better food and separate quarters, but if they ceased to be of value to the Nazis, they would have been murdered. Romilly called it a privileged nightmare.

Of all the prisoners you wrote about, who made the biggest impression on you?
There was one who stood out for the wrong reasons and one for the right ones. Douglas Bader was the most famous soldier, on either side of the entire Second World War really. He had lost both his legs in a flying accident before the war, yet nonetheless, he became an enormously brave Spitfire pilot. He was shot down over France and taken to Colditz.

Bader was a man of great courage but he was also not a particularly nice person. He was arrogant, he was rude, he was incredibly unpleasant to people he thought of lower status than him. And he treated his orderly, a man called Alex Ross, really badly. In the middle of the war, some ordinary soldiers were repatriated in prisoner exchanges and Ross was selected for this. He went to Bader and said: "I've got very good news, wing commander, I'm going home." And Bader said: "No, you're not. You're my lackey and you're going to stay here." And poor Alex Ross spent another two years inside Colditz.

On the other side of the ledger, a character that few will have heard of is a Jewish dentist from Glasgow called Julius Green. He looked after the teeth of the people in Colditz, but he was also a spy. He was primarily responsible for writing the coded letters that were being sent back to MI9, the branch of British intelligence that was concerned with prisoner affairs. He was sending back really vital information.

Green was rather wonderful: he was constantly modest, and very self-mocking. He described himself as a professional coward, but actually he wasn't anything of the sort. He was a man of incredible bravery, but we don't really hear his story because louder, more well-known figures have dominated the landscape.

I'm also fascinated by the stories of the women who had a role in Colditz. I was expecting this to be a strictly all-male story; it's not. For example, there was the extraordinary character of Mrs M. She was a Scotswoman in Warsaw, speaking perfect Polish and posing as a Polish housewife, who was actually running the escape networks out of Poland. And many of the Colditz soldiers owed her their liberty.

And then there's another woman who played a very important part. I've mentioned Julius Green, the spy dentist. Well, Irmgard Wernicke was the German dental assistant in the town of Colditz, but she was also an anti-Nazi resistance plotter. And even though her father was head of the local Nazi party, she was providing the soldiers in Colditz with crucial bits of information.

Following their release at the end of the war, how easy did the men find it to readjust to society?
As with many soldiers and many prisoners, it was very hard. The world was never the same again after the war.

Some managed to adjust and have very successful careers. Pat Reid, who was probably the most famous escaper, established a mini-industry around Colditz. He wrote books, he patented the board game and he went on tour. But there are other, much sadder stories of people who never recovered. There are stories of suicide, and of people who had mental breakdowns.

There is a lot of mental strain that comes from being in any kind of prison, but being in a prisoner of war camp is particularly hard because it is seemingly without end. Quite a lot of people in Colditz suffered grievous mental distress from being in there so long. People are not supermen; people are not made of this granite material that doesn't respond to stress.

So it's not all about the cheeky-chappy, cheery, moustachioed officer who strides off into the sunset and the world is a better place. Life isn't like that, and imprisonment certainly isn't like that. H

Inside man
Julius Morris Green spied for the British Directorate of Military Intelligence while he was captive at Colditz. "He was a man of incredible bravery," says Ben Macintyre

GETTY/ALAMY/PUBIC DOMAIN

Ben Macintyre is a bestselling author and journalist who has written several books on espionage and the Second World War including *Operation Mincemeat, The Spy and the Traitor* and *SAS: Rogue Heroes*, which is the subject of an upcoming BBC One drama

Colditz: Prisoners of the Castle
by Ben Macintyre (Viking, 2022)

Funding the fightback

Stories like Paul's show how vital Cancer Research UK's work is, and demonstrate the importance of gifts in Wills in helping the charity to save lives

Paul was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia in 2007 at the age of 34. He's about to mark 15 years since his diagnosis, and is celebrating the fact that his check-ups are every three months now, instead of every month.

Paul was on holiday in the US with his fiancée Emma when he was diagnosed. "I'd had a cough and blurred vision, but it wasn't until my eyesight deteriorated dramatically that I was given an MRI scan and received the devastating news that I had cancer," he says. "I was immediately prescribed a drug called Glivec and continued to take this for a further 22 months.

> "Without the work of Cancer Research UK, my life may have not only been so much harder, but inevitably so much shorter; that's why I am saying thank you with a gift in my Will"

"Emma and I married in May 2008, five months after my diagnosis and we now run our own fire safety business. As a former fire-fighter, it came as a shock to me when my own life needed saving. I am both humbled and eternally grateful to Cancer Research UK and its supporters." The charity's scientists carried out the early genetics work that underpinned the development of Glivec, which is an effective treatment not just against leukemia, but also against certain rare stomach cancers as well.

"Emma and I now have a lovely boy called Freddie, who is nine and keeps us living life to the full." Paul is also proud to be able to leave a legacy so more cases like his have a positive outcome. "You don't get a chance to say thank you in person to a scientist who played a part in saving your life! Leaving a legacy gift in your Will not only says thank you, but may also improve the chances of future generations."

A history of progress

Ever since the launch of its predecessor, the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, 120 years ago, Cancer Research UK has been striving to improve the outcomes of everyone diagnosed with cancer.

The charity has played a key role in the progress that has already seen survival in the UK double in the last 40 years, including pioneering treatments such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Today, 2 in 4 people survive their cancer for at least 10 years[1].

But it wants to go further, and faster. By supporting Cancer Research UK with a gift in your Will, the charity will be able to continue to fund transformative research that will make a lasting impact long into the future. A third of the organisation's research is funded by gifts in Wills, and so much of this work simply wouldn't be possible without them.

Decades of striving

One of the first big leaps forward in understanding the biology of leukaemia came in the 1970s when the charity's scientists were able to show there are different types of the disease for the first time, leading to the development of more targeted treatments. By 1977 there was increased research into bone marrow stem cells, and how they can cause and affect blood cancers. But it was 1982 that would prove a watershed year for leukaemia treatment with the development of imatinib, also known as Glivec. This was the first genetically tailored cancer drug, developed thanks in part to Cancer Research UK, and it helped scientists track down a genetic fault that fuels almost all cases of chronic myeloid leukaemia, which imatinib targets. Just 10 years ago, Cancer Research UK scientists transformed the treatment for acute myeloid leukaemia by trialling a combination of chemotherapy drugs that has been used ever since.

Gifts in Wills have helped fund breakthroughs in the past and will continue to shape the research of the future.

[1] Cancer Research UK, cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/survival, Accessed July 2022

[2] Ahmad AS et al, British Journal of Cancer, 2015

LEFT: Laboratory head Mick Bulbrook (left) in his laboratory at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, 1970s

RIGHT: Paul with his wife, Emma, and son, Freddie

The future is in your hands

Sadly, 1 in 2 people in the UK born after 1960 will get cancer in their lifetime[2], but continued research into early detection can help more of us beat it.

Gifts in Wills are vital to helping fund Cancer Research UK's life-saving research, accelerating its progress and helping to save more lives.

A legacy of £6,000 could fund a whole research group for the day at the Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute. Researchers there are currently focused on pushing forward improvements in the diagnosis and treatment of several cancer types, including blood cancer.

Cancer Research UK has come so far in the past 120 years. But the charity will go so much further with the help of gifts in Wills.

CANCER RESEARCH UK

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

To find out more about the power of gifts in Wills, visit cruk.org/legacy

Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666), the Isle of Man (1103) and Jersey (247)

James Arthur Harley
A fiery priest and polymath

PAMELA ROBERTS charts the career of a brilliant Antiguan-born scholar who – whether he was blazing a trail at Oxford University, crossing swords with clergymen in Kent, or winning a debating prize at a top American college – rarely failed to ruffle establishment feathers

At a meeting of a district council in 1928, a newly elected member stood up and gave a speech in which he proposed a motion that was bound to antagonise nearly everyone in the room. James Arthur Harley, the only black councillor in the Leicestershire town of Shepshed, confronted a sea of white faces and accused them of corruption, of taking backhanders, and insisted that they resign forthwith.

In view of what he described as the "unfair completion, undue influence, sly bribery, and insidious corruption tainting the atmosphere of so many local government bodies in nearly every nook and cranny in England", Harley urged his colleagues "to resign his office of councillor in common honesty rather than remain on the council to grab all he can for himself while in office".

Harley's words were outspoken, eloquent – and entirely in character. This was, after all, a man who had repeatedly fought for his voice to be heard during a career that had seen him excel as a scholar at some of the top educational institutions in the United States and Britain and serve as a popular black priest.

Now, at that district council meeting, his voice *was* being heard, but it was not warmly welcomed by his fellow councillors. They dismissed the motion without a discussion – not that Harley was perturbed. During his time as a Shepshed councillor, a local newspaper came to refer to him as the "Stormy Petrel", after the seabird often seen shortly before a squall.

> "A local newspaper referred to Harley as the 'Stormy Petrel', after the seabird often seen shortly before a squall"

Island hopping

James Arthur Harley was born 55 years earlier, in 1873, on the Caribbean island of Antigua – to a black mother, Josephine Eleanor Lake, and a white father, Henry James Harley. From a young age he knew that he wanted to be a priest in the Pentecostal Episcopal church, and was fortunate to be educated at the Mico School, considered the best on the island, before entering a teachers' training college.

Although Harley qualified and taught in various schools, Antigua had limited opportunities and so he had to venture to Puerto Rico. There, he secured a position at the All-Saints School and crossed paths with a man who would fundamentally impact his life, Reverend Joseph Nathaniel Bean. Having studied at the General Theology Seminary in New York – the oldest in the Episcopal church and a leading centre of theological education – Bean was able to provide Harley with references addressed to the dean of the seminary.

With those in his suitcase, Harley departed for the United States. It was a decision that would, at times, expose him to crippling financial difficulties and endemic racism. This was 1899 and Harley had arrived in the States just three years after the historic Supreme Court case of Plessy v Ferguson, which implemented the doctrine of "separate but equal" and legitimised racial segregation laws in the south.

Harley encountered his first obstacle as soon as he set foot in New York. On arriving at the seminary, he was instructed to go to Howard University in Washington DC, where many black clergy were trained. He reluctantly assented but, instead of studying for the ministry, he decided to pursue his academic dreams first, enrolling on a law and classics degree. It was now that he began to realise his immense scholarly potential.

In fact, such was Harley's talent and perseverance, he won places at two of America's most prestigious universities: Yale and Harvard. He spent a year as a freshman at the former, and studied Semitic languages and the histories and cultures of ancient Semitic peoples at the latter. Harvard also awarded him a debating and presentation prize.

At Harvard, Harley formed a friendship with Alain LeRoy Locke, future architect of an African-American cultural revival called the "Harlem Renaissance" and first-ever black Rhodes Scholar. Locke had been offered a place at Oxford University and, in 1907, Harley decided to follow him. Funding his travel with the money he won in an essay prize, he read for a theology degree at Jesus College. In 1909, he became the first black student to achieve the Diploma of Anthropology from Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum.

That same year, Harley chose not to continue down the path as an academic, but return to his childhood vocation by joining the Anglican church. "The chaplain, the dean

ILLUSTRATION BY **KARA DINNING**

MICHAEL WORTLEY/DREAMSTIME

of college, was quite satisfied with my papers," he wrote. "My invitation to have lunch with Lord Bishop and Lady Mary Glenn at Peterborough Palace I took as a sign of acceptance of Holy Orders. I was licensed to the curacy of Shepshed on 19 September 1909."

Harley moved to Leicestershire and took up the post of curate at St Botolph's Church, which was soon packed to the rafters for his eloquent and inspiring sermons. He also inaugurated a men's service, men's Bible classes and English lessons for the study of William Shakespeare – innovations that didn't go unnoticed in the local press. "During the past few weeks, [he] had pursued a vigorous policy and has made various efforts to resuscitate church work in all its branches," reported the *Leicester Chronicle*.

Yet Harley's proactivity – and his refusal to conform to the style of traditional Victorian gentleman cleric – didn't endear him to the incumbent vicar, Reverend William Franklin Hepworth, who scathingly observed that St Botolph's was "packed with scum when he [Harley] preached". An incident between the two men at a St Andrew's Day event (the details of which are unknown) triggered a petition from the Sunday school teachers protesting Harley's unjust treatment for doing what he felt to be his spiritual duty. The episode ended with Harley's resignation.

Holy war of words

St John's Church in rural Kent became Harley's second curacy, this time under the direction of Reverend Reginald Arthur Kent. Again, he succeeded in bringing people to services from across the scattered parish; but again he clashed with his superior. In terms of age, educational background and approach to preaching, Harley and Kent were diametrically opposed. Their numerous disagreements required the intervention of Randall Davidson, the archbishop of Canterbury, who insisted the new curate be given an extended trial period so that Reverend Kent could learn to work with him. On 11 June 1911, Harley

Harley pictured (on the right) at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum in 1908. A year later, he would become the first black student to achieve the Diploma of Anthropology from the museum

A portrait of Harley dressed as a curate, taken in around 1911, the year he was ordained as a priest at Canterbury Cathedral

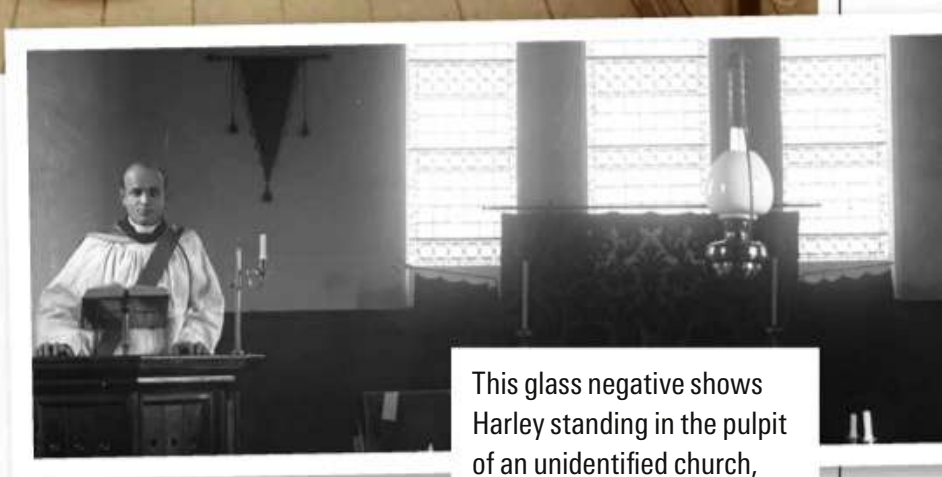
was ordained as a priest at Canterbury Cathedral and spent the next three years officiating at St Leonard's Church in the parish of Deal, Kent.

Then came the First World War. Going against the Church of England's ruling that ministers should not enlist in the armed forces, Harley attempted to sign up. When he was turned down, he returned to Shepshed where, during screenings of Charlie Chaplin films at the Picture Palace, he took to the stage to encourage local men to enlist. He also trained to become a skilled munitions worker.

It was in Shepshed that Harley eventually settled. After the war, he turned to local politics and reinvented himself as an independent councillor, where he became known for his unorthodox and abrasive approach. As chairman of the housing committee, he personally visited 72 residents accompanied by a joiner in order to carry out repairs. Harley also produced a weekly newspaper, *The Shepshed Bulletin* (later *The Charnwood Bulletin*) to voice his criticisms of the council, much to the chagrin of his fellow councillors.

> "Harley took the stage during screenings of Charlie Chaplin films to encourage men to enlist for the armed forces"

Harley died on 12 May 1943 and was buried three days later, on his 70th birthday, at Leicestershire's Oaks-in-Charnwood Cemetery. Yet his legacy of service to the region endured, and 54 years after his death Shepshed Town Council named a road in his honour. "Here, Here! I say," wrote local John Rippon. "When I was *Echo*'s Shepshed reporter, plenty of folks around could still remember the multi-talented West Indian." In fact, so extraordinary were the stories that Rippon was moved to write a feature asking if John Arthur Harley was Shepshed's man of the century. H



This glass negative shows Harley standing in the pulpit of an unidentified church, c1911. Around this time, he was working in Kent

MICHAEL WORTLEY

Pamela Roberts is a historian, creative cultural heritage producer and founder of Black Oxford: Untold Stories, celebrating Oxford University's historical and contemporary black scholars

Black History Month on HistoryExtra: Read the latest news and features at: *historyextra.com/black-history*

Built on lies One of the most enduring myths in history is that Israelite slaves constructed the pyramids, as shown in this copper engraving of 1630. Historians have shown that slave labour of this kind did not really exist in Egypt

Why we need to get our facts straight

It's impossible to attain the full truth of what occurred in the past. But, as history continues to be twisted for political gain, it's critically important that we try

BY **ROBERT BLACKMORE**

AKG-IMAGES

When passing on facts about the past, disseminators of popular history, such as this magazine, are in constant danger of misinforming the public. In journalism today it has become commonplace to employ fact-checkers to assess statements made by public figures. As a fact-checker for *BBC History Magazine* and other publications, as well as a trained historian, it is my job to verify the historical details in our articles, to ensure the greatest possible veracity. Yet, as the Italian writer and philosopher Umberto Eco wrote in his novel *The Name of the Rose*, echoing St Paul, "we see now through a glass darkly, and the truth, before it is revealed to all, face to face, we see in fragments (alas, how illegible) in the error of the world". What we know about the past is based on incomplete evidence, the meaning of which is often obscure. This being the case, how can we, and – more importantly – why should we fact-check history? After all, what are historical "facts"?

The English noun "fact" ultimately derives from the Latin word *factum* for "an act, a deed, something done". Originally this had a specific legal meaning, though the *Oxford English Dictionary* now lists 10 broader definitions, plus a wide variety of senses. Two of the most frequently used are clearly distinct. The difference, especially when applied to history, between "that which is known (or firmly believed) to be real or true" and "a thing that has really occurred or is actually the case" is considerable. The former assumes facts are unavoidably subjective, and only our current assessment of reality; whereas the latter asserts that historical facts are fixed and absolute truths. In practical terms this is a false dichotomy. While there have, of course, always been disagreements about the nature of truth – indeed over whether it exists at all – most sensible people grant that it does, but that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to attain fully.

As new evidence appears, or old evidence is reinterpreted, our view should improve. The great French medieval historian Marc Bloch firmly believed that our "knowledge of the past is something progressive, which is constantly transforming and perfecting itself". After all, the Sumerian King List, the earliest versions of which date to the late third millennium BC, was once considered the essential historical source for the political history of ancient Mesopotamia. Yet we now know that a number of kings it contains were entirely fictional, as were many of the dates and events. Likewise, a considerable proportion of ostensibly early medieval charters from across western Europe are later forgeries – mainly produced in the 12th century – and this was only properly understood from the 19th century.

With such discoveries, our understanding of what constitutes historical facts must change. This process cannot be dismissed as unnecessary "revisionism" or "rewriting history". If that is your position, you may as well believe in the discovery and settlement of Britain by Brutus, the supposed descendant of the mythical Trojan Aeneas, an idea once commonly accepted in medieval England thanks to the proliferation of the *Brut Chronicle*.

Given the propensity for our "facts" about history to alter, what sources of information exist that we can reliably check against? What if these are themselves wrong? It is admittedly easy to acquire the cynical belief that history comprises nothing but lies and mistakes inexorably laid down over the centuries. Yet therein lies a post-truth world, one that should be swiftly rejected, for it allows for the arbitrary denial of anything, not least the greatest crimes of history, such as the Holocaust.

We can do better than that. If false information can spread faster online today than in the past, books and articles by reputable authorities are likewise more accessible. Some sources are more trustworthy than others, and these can be rapidly cross-checked for disagreements.

"What soon becomes clear is that experts make and perpetuate basic mistakes. Even the dates they ascribe to events are sometimes wrong

What soon becomes clear is that experts make and perpetuate basic mistakes. Even the dates they ascribe to events, a staple of history, are sometimes wrong. This is partly because dating systems were, and are, multifarious and bewildering. Some ancient Greeks might have dated by the Olympiad, the Romans by who held their consulships. The Maya, like many Mesoamerican civilisations, confusingly used not only a 365-day calendar cycle and a 260-day ritual cycle, but also marked events or the deeds of their leaders from a base date at the beginning of a cycle of 5,125 years.

The Christian system of dating events from the birth of Christ – *Anno Domini* ("in the year of the Lord") or AD, secularised today as CE, or Common Era – might seem simple and clear. After all, it has become increasingly used since its invention by the Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus (Denis the Little) in the sixth century AD, especially after the later addition of BC for the years "before Christ". Yet we don't know when Christ was supposedly born. Possibly it was in 4 BC or before. There is also no year 0

Complex cycles
This Mayan calendar illustrates the intricacy of the Mesoamerican civilisation's date-keeping, which involved three separate systems based on cycles of different lengths

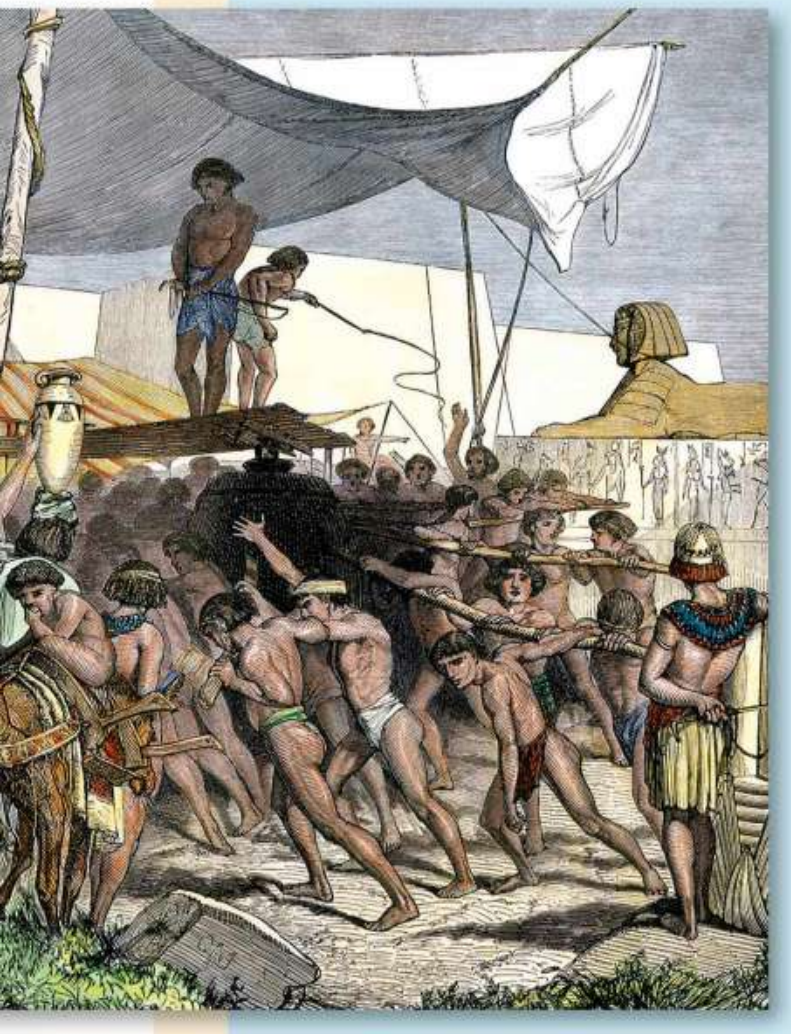
Royal register
The Sumerian King List was once considered an essential source of the rulers of ancient Mesopotamia, recorded here in cuneiform script on a clay prism. It's since been found to include both historical fact and myth

Dates with destiny
Russian soldiers in Petrograd (St Petersburg) rally to join the February Revolution in 1917. In the Gregorian calendar, the uprising took place in March

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

How Herodotus constructed a lie

Why a fictional account of the building of Egypt's "Great Pyramid" has thrived for 2,500 years



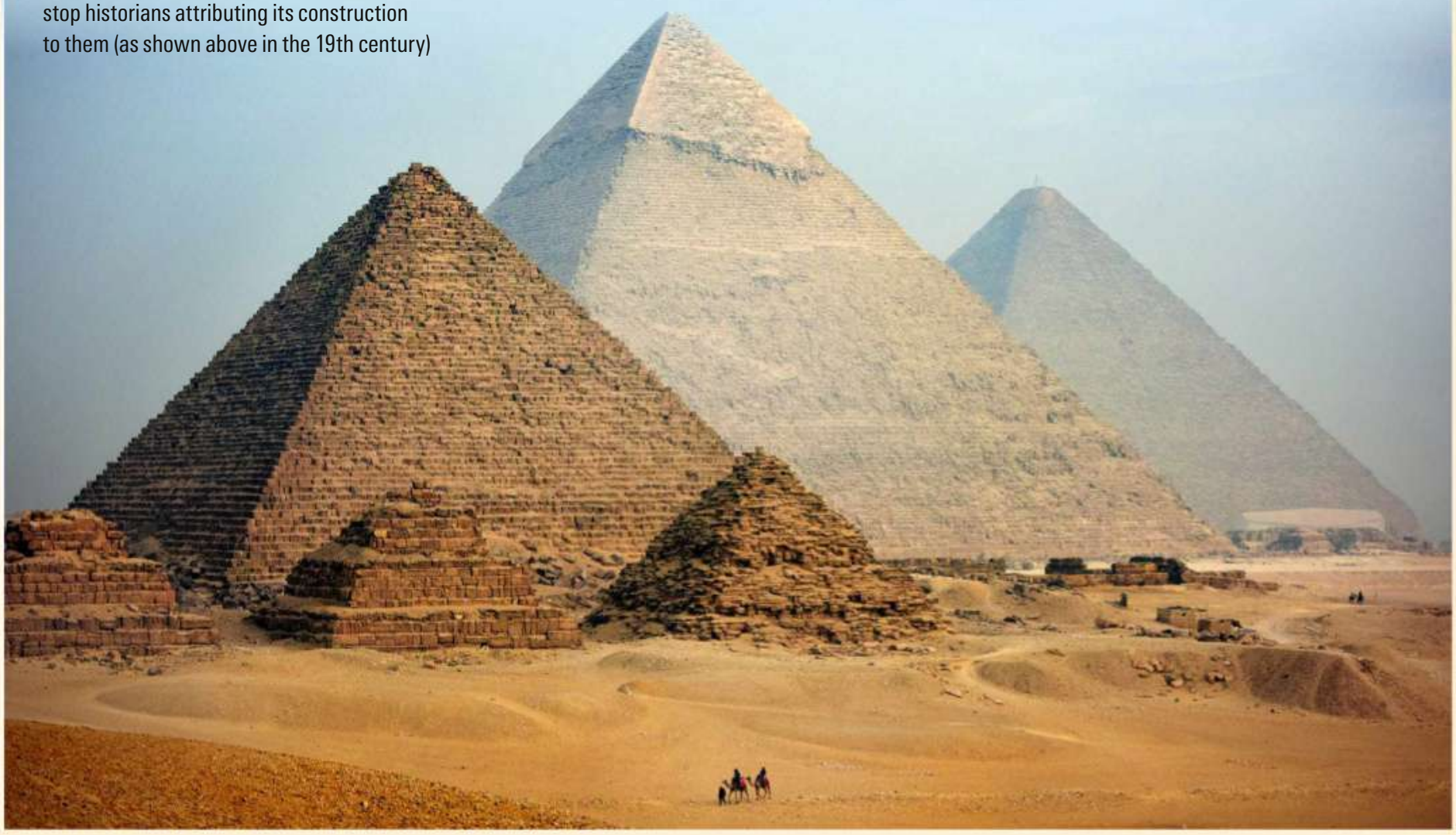
Out of time The purported enslavement of the people of Israel couldn't have happened until a thousand years after the Great Pyramid was built. Yet that didn't stop historians attributing its construction to them (as shown above in the 19th century)

If you're looking for an example of how a falsehood can flourish for millennia, transforming popular perceptions of a historical event, then look no further than the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (c484–c420 BC). Herodotus is considered the "father of history", yet he passed on many dubious "facts". Few of these have been more enduring than the idea that the pyramids of Giza in northern Egypt were erected (c2575–c2465 BC) by a vast army of maltreated slaves.

According to Book II of his *Histories*, in building the "Great Pyramid" the pharaoh Khufu (called Cheops by the Greeks) "compelled all the Egyptians to work for him", "in gangs of a hundred thousand men, each gang for three months" for 20 years. This, we are told, "brought the people to utter misery".

Egyptologists now explain that such slave labour did not really exist in ancient Egypt. The pyramid-builders were a mix of 4,000–5,000 permanent skilled workers and some 20,000 temporary labourers, who assisted for a few months at a time, probably during the annual Nile floods when agricultural work was on hiatus. All were paid, in graded notional rations of bread and beer that were tradeable for other goods and services.

Yet the truth didn't prevent Herodotus's description taking root, and his version of how the Great Pyramid came into being was repeated by later ancient writers. Some, like the Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37–100), conflated his builders with those people of Israel held in slavery in Egypt described in the Old Testament book of *Exodus*. This idea was echoed in 1977 by Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and still persists in the popular consciousness of Christians in the west. Even if we ignore the questionable historicity of biblical narratives, the supposed events of the book of *Exodus* are in any case cautiously dated to the 13th century BC, more than a thousand years after the pyramids of Giza were built.



AKG-IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

between 1 BC and 1 AD. The modern Greek government fell foul of this by erroneously marking the 2,500th anniversary of the 480 BC battle of Thermopylae in 2020.

Then there are repeated confusions between the Julian (also called Old Style) and Gregorian (New Style) calendars. The latter was introduced in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII, advancing the calendar a number of days to correct discrepancies from the solar year, but this was not adopted everywhere immediately. Britain did not switch until 1752 (to considerable protest at having allegedly "lost 11 days"). This means that for every event before the changeover we have two potential dates we could use. Russia did not give up the Julian Calendar until 1918. So, as far as we are concerned, the 1917 February Revolution took place in March, and the Bolshevik October Revolution ("Red October") actually occurred in November.

Many people often assume that years start on 1 January, our "New Year", but even in Europe this is a fairly recent innovation. Depending on when and where we are talking about, a new year might begin at any point between Christmas and Easter. Medieval and early modern England generally switched years on 25 March (Lady Day). Therefore, for us, King Charles I of England was executed on 30 January 1649, but at the time it was still 1648. Regnal years were also often used: counted from a ruler's accession, or sometimes their coronation. These can be simpler if known and fixed, but not always. Spare a thought for scholars of King John, whose regnal year began on Ascension Day, a moveable feast that shifted in line with Easter.

Like dates, terminology is often problematic. Just as to an archaeologist Stonehenge is not really a "henge", since true henges have external banks and internal ditches that delineate a central area, historical terms can be misapplied. Even well-informed military historians refer to the German army in the Second World War as the "Wehrmacht". This actually comprised all armed forces, including the Kriegsmarine (navy) and Luftwaffe (air force). What they really mean is the *Heer*.

Words used to describe territorial entities are especially misused. It has become convention to refer to the "western" and "eastern" Roman empires as if they were recurrently distinct entities from the third century AD. Just as there were often co-emperors, in principle it was still one empire. Likewise, because we place undue importance on the collapse in the west at the end of the fifth century, the Roman east then transforms in our minds into the "Byzantine" empire, even though it arguably remained Roman until the Ottomans took Constantinople in 1453. To complicate matters further, the Frankish king Charlemagne was crowned emperor of the Romans in 800, then later, from 1254, a portion of his conquests became known as the Holy Roman empire, which, as Voltaire pointed out in 1756, "was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire".

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Mistakes on the march German troops during a parade to mark victory in Poland, October 1939. The German army of that era is often incorrectly referred to as the Wehrmacht, when in fact it should be called the *Heer*

Naturally, we cannot always avoid inserting anachronisms, because history is complicated and we do not live in the past. Yet, when we use terms casually outside of their appropriate period, the passing of time rapidly loses meaning and our understanding of it becomes incoherent. It does to the historical record what burrowing rodents do to the archaeological stratigraphy. Even the most prestigious institutions do this. A recent exhibition at the British Museum included a label referring to an exchange of gifts between "English" and "French" Neolithic chieftains. Such errors carry serious risks since they offer a false impression of continuity that suits those modern ethno-nationalists who might wish to mistakenly connect a people with a place. In these cases, anachronistic geography should always be carefully caveated to account for the impermanence of states and nations.

Beyond the details and terminology, we often encounter broader problems with the sense of the history presented to the reader. Sometimes what is meant is simply unclear. Statements that are vaguely stated or poorly framed can convey to readers further erroneous information. "Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan led the first circumnavigation of Earth" would be an example of this. Actually, Magellan himself died halfway round; it was Juan Sebastián Elcano who led the expedition on its return.

Often, ideas have just become too entrenched in popular culture to question, and so historians include them

"Many people often assume that years start on 1 January, our 'New Year', but even in Europe this is a fairly recent innovation

Popular image A scene from the Bayeux Tapestry depicts the death of King Harold II in battle in 1066, showing a figure (left) pulling an arrow from his eye. Yet whether this colourful story is the truth remains uncertain and is subject to debate by historians

thoughtlessly. There's seemingly nothing wrong with the statement: "The Great War ended in 1918." But, technically speaking, though hostilities had largely ceased by the armistice in November 1918, the war itself was brought to an official end somewhat later, by the Treaties of Versailles, Trianon and others. Likewise, we can't mistake unqualified value judgments for facts. You cannot state that Thomas Edison "was the greatest inventor of electrical appliances" or that "Kublai Khan decreed the stateliest pleasure-dome" without making clear that these assertions are based on, say, total annual sales of devices or palatial construction costs.

Some speculation is, of course, perfectly acceptable. Pedantry should never stifle imagination. It is conjecture, tested against the available evidence, that keeps historical discussion fresh and appealing, as well as pushing the boundaries of enquiry. This is so long as the degree of certainty is clear to readers.

It is also fine to include hearsay or interpretations that pass to us by tradition, as these add colour to depictions of the past. History would be cold and dull were all the anecdotes and half-truths expunged, leaving just those things historians deem worthy of near absolute certainty. Again, only clarity is required. The phrase "King Harold was struck in the eye by an arrow at the battle of Hastings" gives the false impression that we know this for sure. It is far better to state that "*according to popular belief*, King Harold was struck in the eye".

You may ask, why does all this matter if people read about history for entertainment? To engage with the past as (following LP Hartley) "a foreign country" where people "do things differently", is certainly enjoyable escapism. Arguably, were this its only purpose, factual accuracy might not be all that important.

But history is also useful. Only by knowing about the past can we properly understand the present. Whether unintentional misinformation or deliberate disinformation, inaccuracies can steadily distort the picture we get and so negate its usefulness. Once they begin circulating, false ideas about history are naturally inclined to then stick resiliently to our collective memory. Many people still believe in a historical King Arthur, or that the pyramids in Egypt were built by slaves (see box-out on page 44). This phenomenon has been observed almost as long as there have been historians. Thucydides, writing in late fifth-century BC Greece, noted that "most people, in fact, will not take trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear".

"History would be cold and dull were all the anecdotes and half-truths expunged, leaving just those things deemed worthy of absolute certainty

This alone should convince as to the value of fact-checking. But I would argue that it should be applied far more widely to combat the misuse of popular history. Because, when people consciously or unconsciously twist historical details to suit their purpose, it can have very-real often-destructive effects in the present day. For a recent – albeit extreme – example, look no further than Russian president Vladimir Putin, who circulated an essay in July 2021 in which he argued that Russians and Ukrainians have been "one people" across more than a thousand years. Replete with errors of detail and terminology, allowing him to misrepresent how national identities and states develop, the essay formed his theoretical justification for Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Suffice to say, had the document been properly fact-checked before publication, Putin could not have made such a claim.

Unavoidably, some historical evidence and its interpretation is, and will remain, under dispute. Our purpose in fact-checking history articles is not to arbitrate opposing views; academic history should do this through the peer review process. Instead, if we eliminate the deliberate or accidental spread of unsubstantiated information, we help facilitate wider appreciation of the past by affirming common ground. If we do this, we can still share in history's most universal function: to understand time, and our place in it.

Then again, one cannot be sure even about the facts I have asserted here. Hopefully someone will have checked them too. H

Dr Robert Blackmore is a historian of the Middle Ages and a fact-checker for *BBC History Magazine*

Olga Koch and Hussein Kesvani explored the history of fact-checking for an episode of the BBC podcast series **Human Error.** Listen here: *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p09xbpps*

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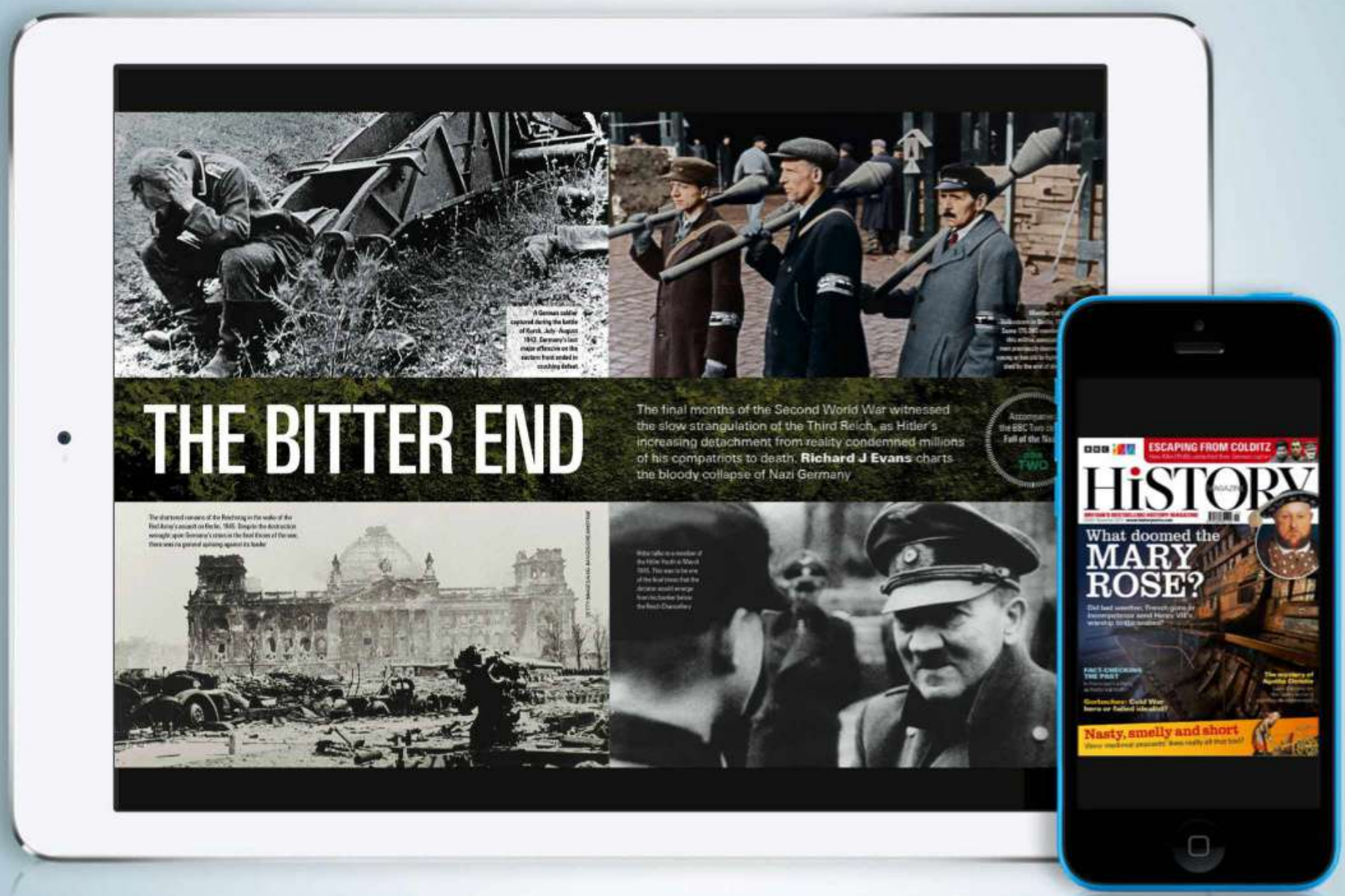
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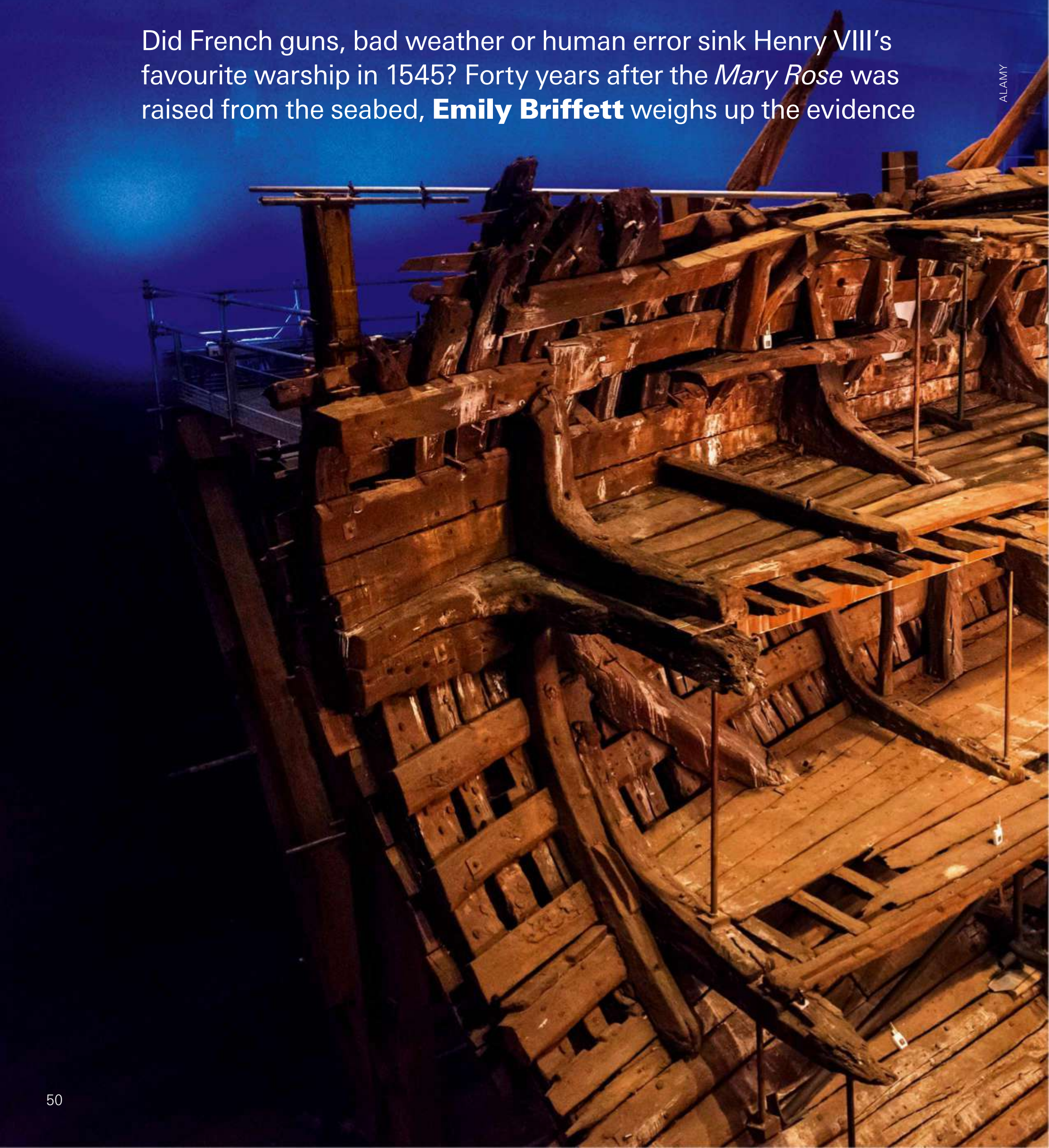
WHAT DOOMED

Did French guns, bad weather or human error sink Henry VIII's favourite warship in 1545? Forty years after the *Mary Rose* was raised from the seabed, **Emily Briffett** weighs up the evidence



ALAMY

THE MARY ROSE?

New lease of life
The wreck of the *Mary Rose* sits in its own dedicated museum in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Historians have long puzzled over the cause of the warship's demise

The air was hot and still as Henry VIII stood on the walls of Southsea Castle on 19 July 1545, looking out over the Solent. England was on the brink of disaster. A massive French invasion fleet lurked only miles away. That was when Henry saw it: his great warship, the *Mary Rose*, lurched onto its starboard side and quickly descended into the depths, taking with it the lives of almost 500 men.

The *Mary Rose* had been Henry's pride and joy. It was one of the first ships he had commissioned as king in 1510 and the ship's captain, Vice Admiral George Carew, was a favourite of Henry's – they had even dined together the night before.

The *Mary Rose's* lifetime almost entirely mapped Henry's dramatic reign. From the moment he assumed the throne in 1509, Henry had harboured ambitions to grow English power on the international stage. He soon sent out a message of aggressive intent by ordering the construction of two huge warships: the *Peter Pomegranate* and the *Mary Rose*.

The following three decades were marked by bloodshed and diplomatic spats as Henry jostled with his European neighbours. Then, in 1542–43, tensions reached boiling point when he made a pact with the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to go to war with France. In 1544 Henry amassed a huge invasion fleet. But then came a setback: at the last moment, Charles backed out. Henry's troops were left abandoned at Calais, with little hope of taking Paris, so instead they successfully laid siege to Boulogne. It wasn't long before King Francis I of France sought to avenge this defeat. And his attempts to exact that revenge would have fatal consequences for the *Mary Rose*.

The *Peter Pomegranate* (above) and its sister warship, the *Mary Rose*, signalled Henry VIII's intentions to make waves on the international stage

A portrait of Francis I. The French king sought revenge on Henry VIII after English troops laid siege to the town of Boulogne

By 1545, the French ruler had assembled a 225-strong fleet of ships on the eastern end of the Isle of Wight, ready to invade England – and he planned to take Portsmouth first. With most of Henry's men away defending his new territory in France, the king and his realm were in a vulnerable position. On 19 July, the French launched their attack.

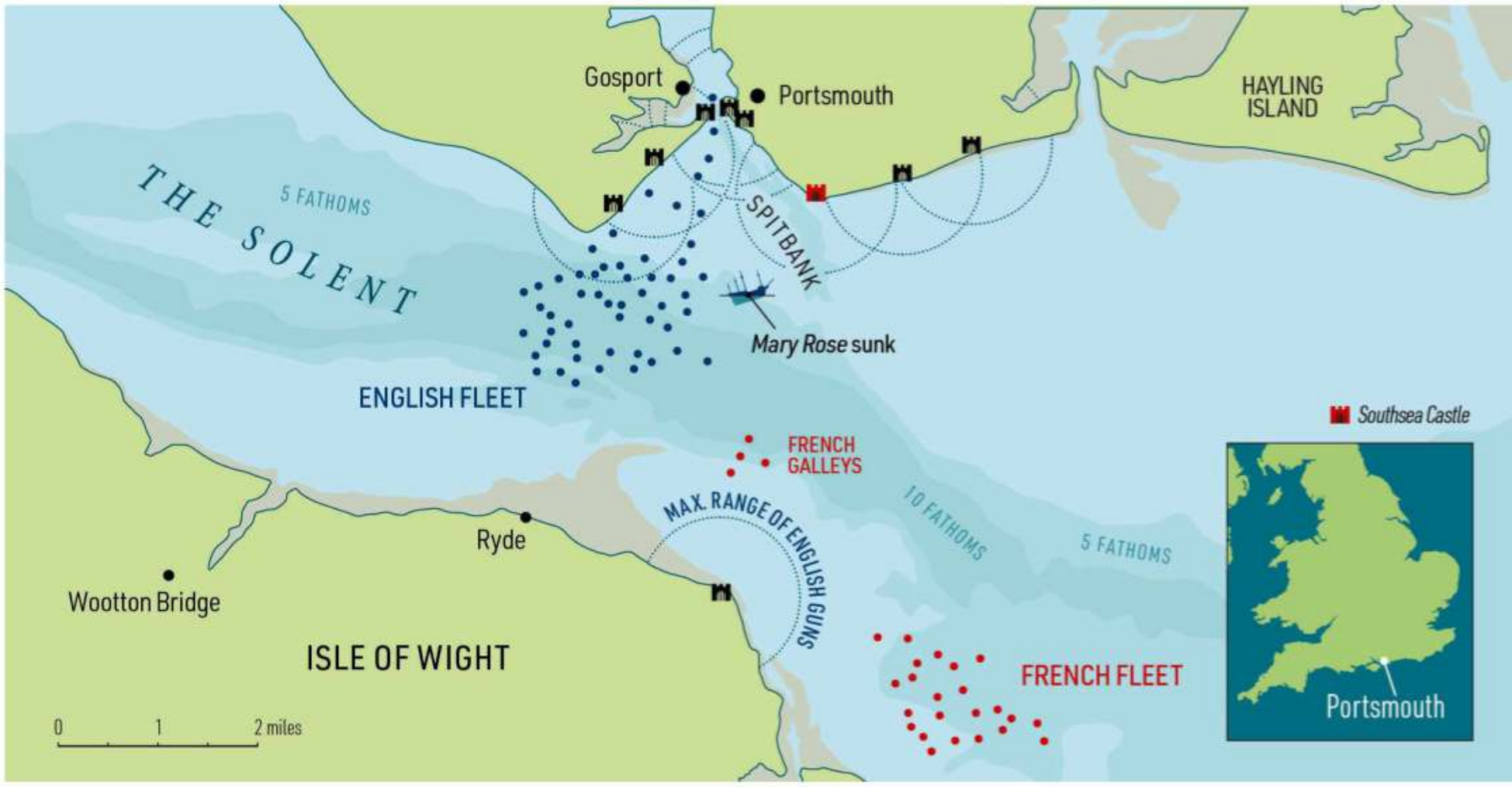
Ready to engage

So what do we know about the events leading up to the *Mary Rose*'s sinking that day? During the afternoon, the vessel, part of an English fleet that was much smaller than its French counterpart, made its final manoeuvre across the Solent. The *Mary Rose* then sailed towards the French ready to engage and likely fired its guns, before turning to port and heading towards the shallow waters

COURTESY OF LESTER KEIGHLEY AND THE MARY ROSE TRUST/GETTY IMAGES

How did 500 divers rescue Henry's favourite ship?
Our new podcast series, *The Mary Rose: Secrets of a Tudor Warship*, delves into the ship's history with the help of experts: *historyextra.com/podcast*

SAILING INTO TROUBLE: A MAP OF THE BATTLE OF THE SOLENT



MAP: PAUL HEWITT – BATTLEFIELD DESIGN

of Spitbank. It was then that it met its fate.

The battle of the Solent – as the clash between the English and French forces is known – raged on after the Mary Rose's sinking. Following a series of naval skirmishes and fighting on the Isle of Wight, the French invasion was ultimately prevented. Yet, with Henry's prized warship now lying on the seabed, a huge shadow was cast over the king's moment of triumph.

So what doomed the *Mary Rose*? This is a question I've been discussing with a series of historians and maritime experts for a new podcast series, *The Mary Rose: Secrets of a Tudor Warship*, and over the following pages, I'll explore six leading theories as to what sent the mighty vessel to the bottom of the sea.

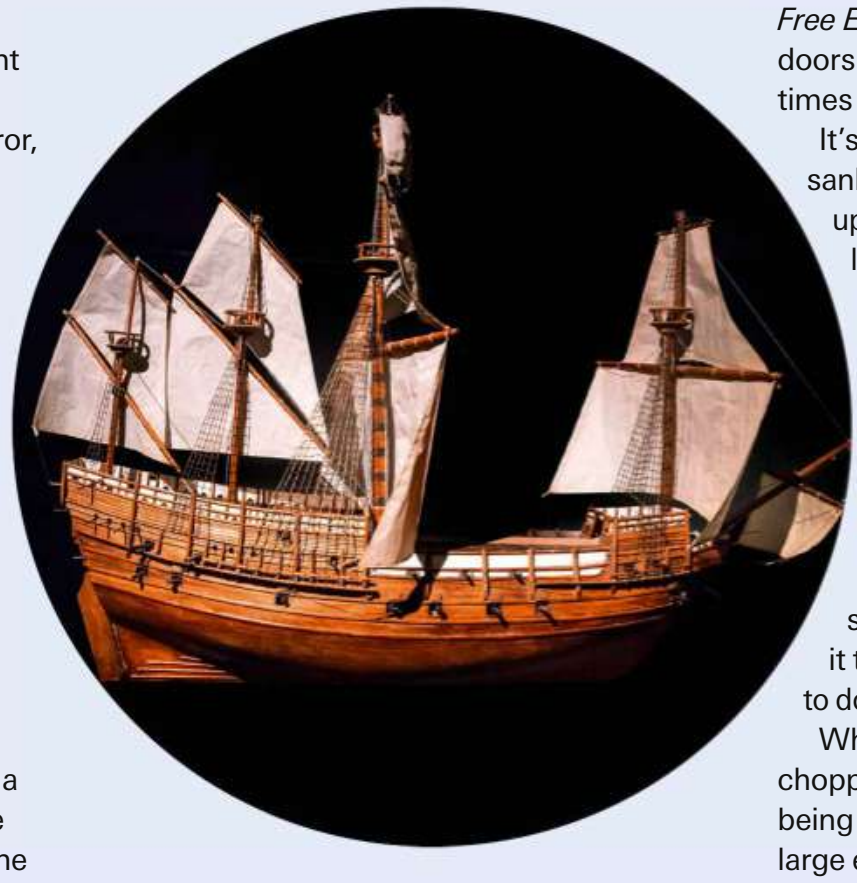
Action scene *The Encampment of the English Forces near Portsmouth* (an 18th-century engraving based on a contemporary painting) depicts the battle of the Solent. The French are shown on the left, the English on the right, and the *Mary Rose* (circled) is sinking in the middle

1 Unpredictable weather

How a rogue gust could have caused the ship to capsize

The only confirmed eyewitness account from onboard the ship comes via the ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor, François van der Delft. In a letter to Charles V on 24 July 1545, he claims to share the testimony of an unnamed Flemish man "amongst the survivors" of the wreck, who stated that the *Mary Rose* "heeled over with the wind" and that "water entered by the lowest row of gun ports which had been left open after firing". There is also archaeological evidence that the gun port lids on both sides of the ship were open when it sank. Could flooding and a sudden gust of wind have combined to set off a fatal chain of events?

If water flooding the gun ports was a risk, wouldn't experienced sailors have known to close them? "In the heat of the moment, things do go wrong," says Christopher Dobbs, one of the original diving team who helped salvage the *Mary Rose* (see box on page 58). "Many people will remember the sinking of the MS *Herald of Free Enterprise* in 1987, where the bow doors were left open – unfortunately, sometimes it's a case of human error."



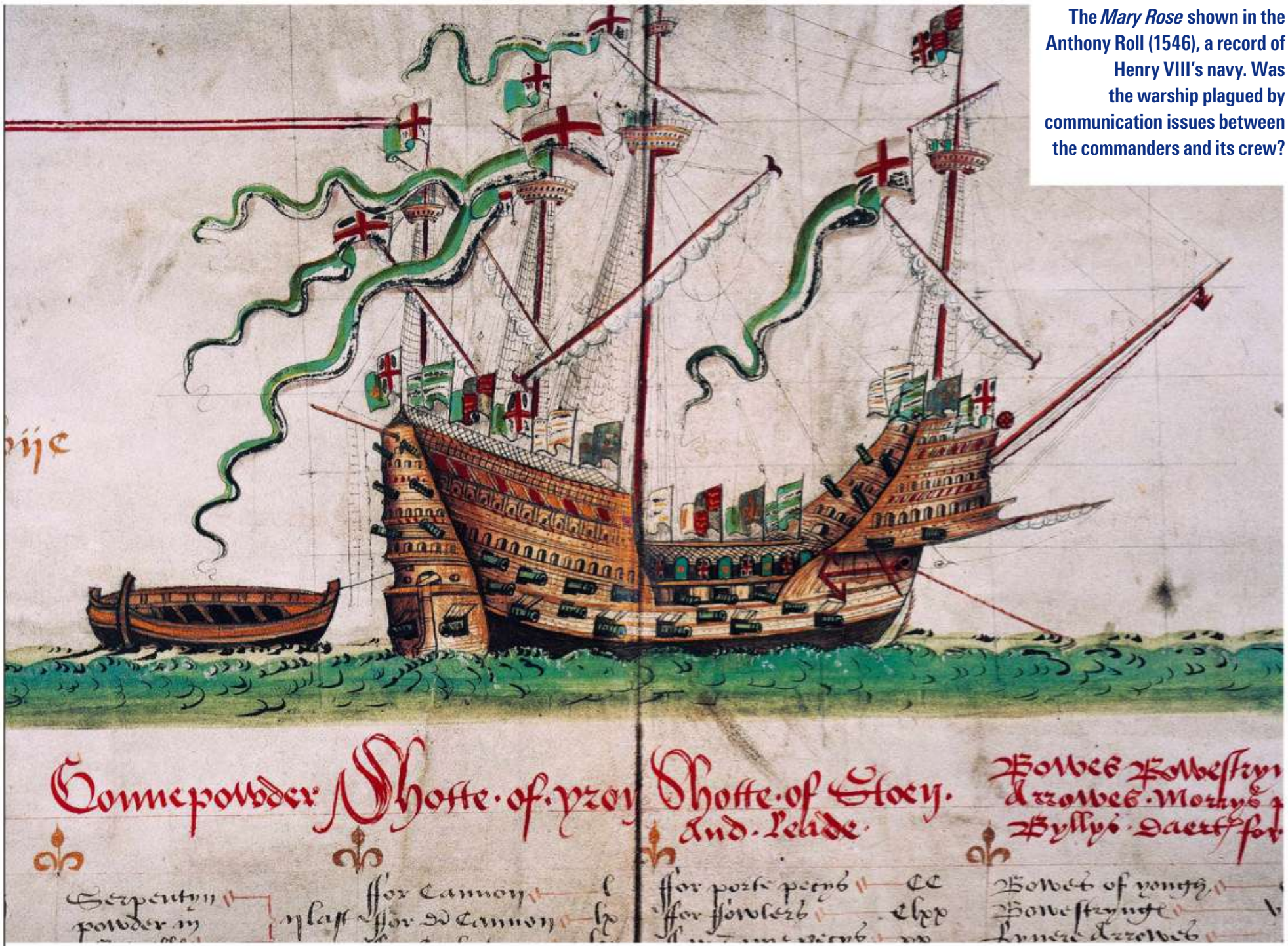
A model of the *Mary Rose*. Archaeological evidence suggests that the ship's gun port lids were open when it sank

It's also been suggested that, when it sank, the *Mary Rose's* mainsail was upwards and flapping in the wind, leading those onshore to attribute its demise to unruly weather. However, according to geographer and battle of the Solent expert Dr Dominic Fontana, that was probably for good reason. "If you're trying to stop a ship from sinking," he says, "the first piece of advice is to stop. If not, more water is pushed into the ship." Cutting lines to the sail, causing it to fly up the yardarm, was one way to do this.

While the Solent can be unpredictably choppy, the chances of a gust of wind being precisely timed and monumentally large enough to blow over a warship on a hot summer's day is unlikely. Could the *Mary Rose* have been sinking for an entirely different reason already?

The MS *Herald of Free Enterprise* capsized in 1987 after its bow doors were left open. Human error may also have contributed to the *Mary Rose*'s demise

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES



The *Mary Rose* shown in the Anthony Roll (1546), a record of Henry VIII's navy. Was the warship plagued by communication issues between the commanders and its crew?

ALAMY

2 Communication issues and unruly crew

Why sailor sickness, onboard tensions and foreign languages have all been blamed

The man in command of the *Mary Rose* that fateful day was Sir George Carew, an aristocrat who had been appointed vice admiral the day before the sinking. Carew was undoubtedly on good terms with Henry VIII but, according to some sources, he didn't enjoy such warm relations with the *Mary Rose*'s crew. So could onboard tensions have contributed to the ship's demise? One biography of George Carew's brother, Peter, records how their uncle, Gawain, was passing by on another ship. Concerned by the *Mary Rose*'s unstable condition, he called to George, who replied, in alarm: "I have the sort of knaves I cannot rule."

A portrait thought to show Vice Admiral Sir George Carew

This claim of an unruly crew may have been made to protect the Carew family name. What seems certain is that the ship was chiefly manned by long-serving mariners (in fact, Peter Carew himself goes on to state how experienced they were). So it is possible that the crew may have simply ignored or gone against commands they disagreed with – for better or for worse.

Meanwhile, another theory is that the sailors were suffering from dysentery and were quite simply physically incapable of fulfilling their roles effectively.

There is also research that has suggested that because some of the crew probably spoke languages other than English, they didn't understand the commands being given. In recent years, the remains of a group of crew members have been analysed. "Taking a sample of around eight to ten, we discovered that two people were of African descent," explains historian Dr Onyeka Nubia. "Finding even one such person would have shocked many people, but my conclusion is that perhaps between one and two thirds of the *Mary Rose* crew were non-English born."

While it's possible that some of the men didn't understand English, it's unlikely to be the cause of the sinking. After all, it was commonplace in the English fleet for crews of this time to have foreign mercenaries, seamen or even pilots on board.

How do you store Tudor nit combs?
Find out in a *Mary Rose* tour at *historyextra.com/period/tudor/out-about-the-mary-rose*

3 Overloaded and overweight

Did the ship take to the waters with too many guns and men?

One of the first purpose-built warships, the *Mary Rose* carried many heavy guns. This bronze cannon is one of two that were found with the wreck

A few years after the sinking, *Hall's Chronicle* reported that the *Mary Rose* "was laden with much ordinaunce, and the portes left open, which were low, & the great ordinaunce unbreached, so that when the ship should turne, the water entered, and sodainly she sanke". To understand if this was likely, we have to look at the wider context. Traditionally, an English monarch would requisition vessels to transport men to fight land battles, but Henry was keen to build up his "army by sea" with a revolutionary new weapon: gunships. "This was really important for naval architecture, particularly the evolution of lidded gun ports," says Christopher Dobbs.

These lids could be shut when not in use, so ships could sink lower in the waterline and house larger and heavier guns. However, the suggestion that the ship sank because its gun ports were too low has been discounted.

In 2007 it emerged that Henry had asked for heavy bronze guns to be positioned in the front of some of his ships, including the *Mary Rose*. In response, the ship's master shipwright and surveyor observed that this would result in a "great weakening to the ship at this point". This is exactly where the stem of the ship had separated from the rest of the hull. Had the *Mary Rose* been compromised by the king's request?

Or was the warship burdened with other weight? The captain's brother claimed that there were as many as 700 men on board – an unusually high number to take into combat. However, the cook's log included a detailed provision list for only 500 men. (A recent reassessment suggests we have the remains of 300 of these.)

The "heavy load" theory has sparked other suggestions. Sir John Oglander, a 17th-century politician, claimed that Henry VIII dined on the *Mary Rose* the night before the battle, and that when he left, all those on board rushed to one side to see him go. Untied ordnance slipped, unbalancing the ship, and water flooded in through the gun ports. Dramatic? Yes. Likely? No.

4 A not so grand design

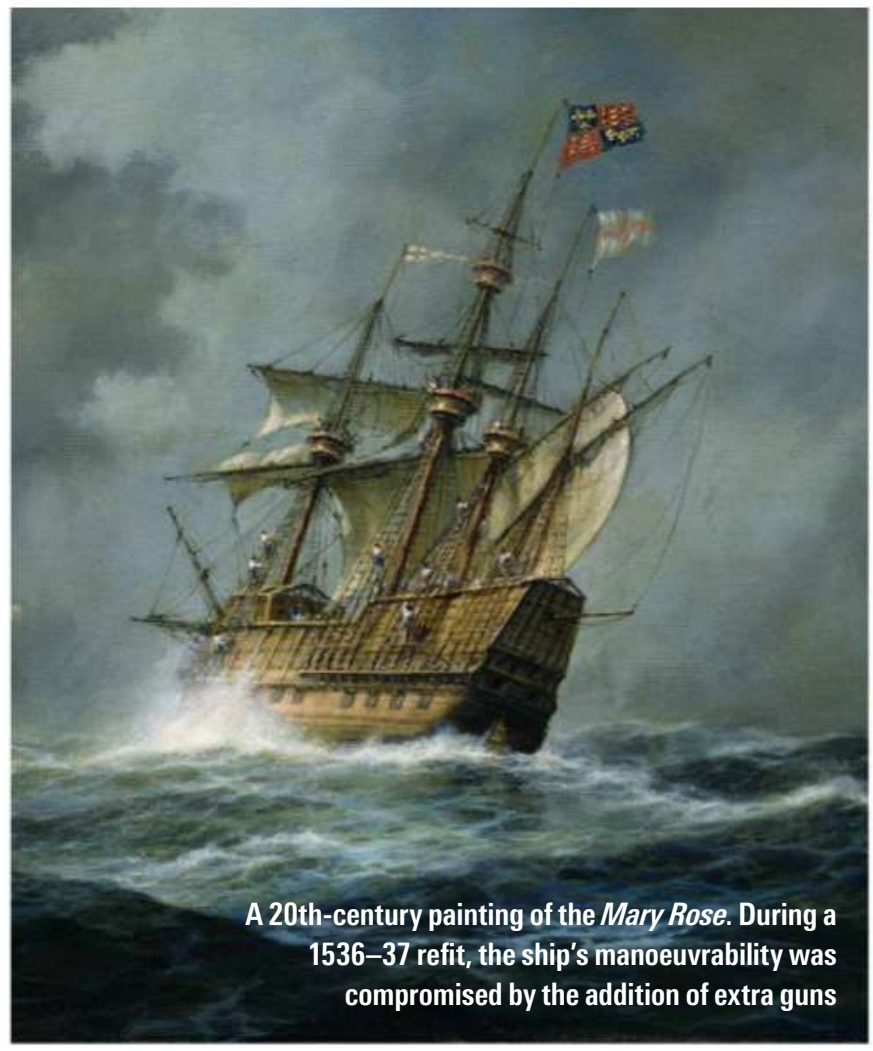
The *Mary Rose* won much praise in its early days, but some believe a refit caused problems

Was Henry's ship simply unfit for battle? Despite the widespread belief that the *Mary Rose* sank on its maiden voyage, it had had a 34-year career beforehand that saw it travel many hundreds of miles, predominantly transporting troops and patrolling England's coasts (including seeing off pirates). After so long at sea, it does seem unlikely that its design was the main cause of its sinking, especially as the *Mary Rose* had won much praise.

Following a brief stint as a warship, it took an unlikely role as Admiral Edward Howard's racing yacht in 1513. He challenged his fleet to race around the coast of Kent, and despite being almost four miles behind some of the lead vessels at the start, the *Mary Rose* went on to win. The admiral praised his swift flagship in a subsequent letter to the king, calling it not just "the noblest ship of sail" but "the flower of all ships that ever sailed". Perhaps he was flattering Henry VIII, but the *Mary Rose's* capability clearly left quite an impression on the admiral.

But even if it was shipshape early in Henry's reign, this could have changed by the time it reached the battle of the Solent. In 1536–37, the *Mary Rose* underwent a major refit, adding extra gun ports and strengthening its sides so it could accommodate extra weight. However, these changes left the ship heavier, compromising the nifty sailing capabilities and manoeuvrability of its earlier racing days.

The Tudor vice admiral John Dudley certainly seems to have thought that at least some of Henry's newly supercharged ships were "unweatherly". Could these later modifications have altered the ship so much that it may have become vulnerable to the dangers lying in wait in the Solent?



A 20th-century painting of the *Mary Rose*. During a 1536–37 refit, the ship's manoeuvrability was compromised by the addition of extra guns

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

English and French ships fire cannon through ports at one another during the battle of Saint-Mathieu in 1512. Did similar firepower account for the *Mary Rose* three decades later?

5 A successful French shot

England's enemy could have landed the fatal blow

One version of events theorises that, on the morning of 19 July, the *Mary Rose* was hit by its French foes some hours before it made its final passage. Martin du Bellay, a French cavalry officer who was present at the battle, stated that the French guns had ultimately been responsible for its sinking. But du Bellay's account is contrary to all others, plus he was a close friend of King Francis I. It's fair to wonder if he was falsifying claims of French glory over the English to justify what had become a failed invasion.

"There were certainly things going on in the hold of the ship, at the point when she sank, that would support the idea she had been hit," argues Dominic Fontana. Later, skeletal remains revealed that several crew members had been working in the hold with carpentry equipment, such as hammers, at the time it had sunk. Though this was not a particularly unusual occurrence, it could have been that these men were mending a hole in the ship.

Those in command may not have been aware of such difficulties, because the ship could have remained upright and felt perfectly stable, even while water was coming in – at least, for a while. "One hundred tons of water would equate to about 18 inches of water in the bottom of the ship – that's all," explains Fontana. "It would look like even less when it was mixed in with the ballast. It would almost disappear, but it would have been fluid enough to roll the weight at the bottom of the ship."

If the *Mary Rose* had been taking on water this might explain why it was heading to the shallows at Spitbank, one of the sandbanks near the harbour entrance, hoping to beach itself only several hundred metres away. Running aground would have been embarrassing, but not deadly.

While there is no direct archaeological evidence that can be attributed to even a modestly sized cannonball, only half the *Mary Rose* was salvageable. Could a French shot have simply hit the port side of the ship now lost to the sea?

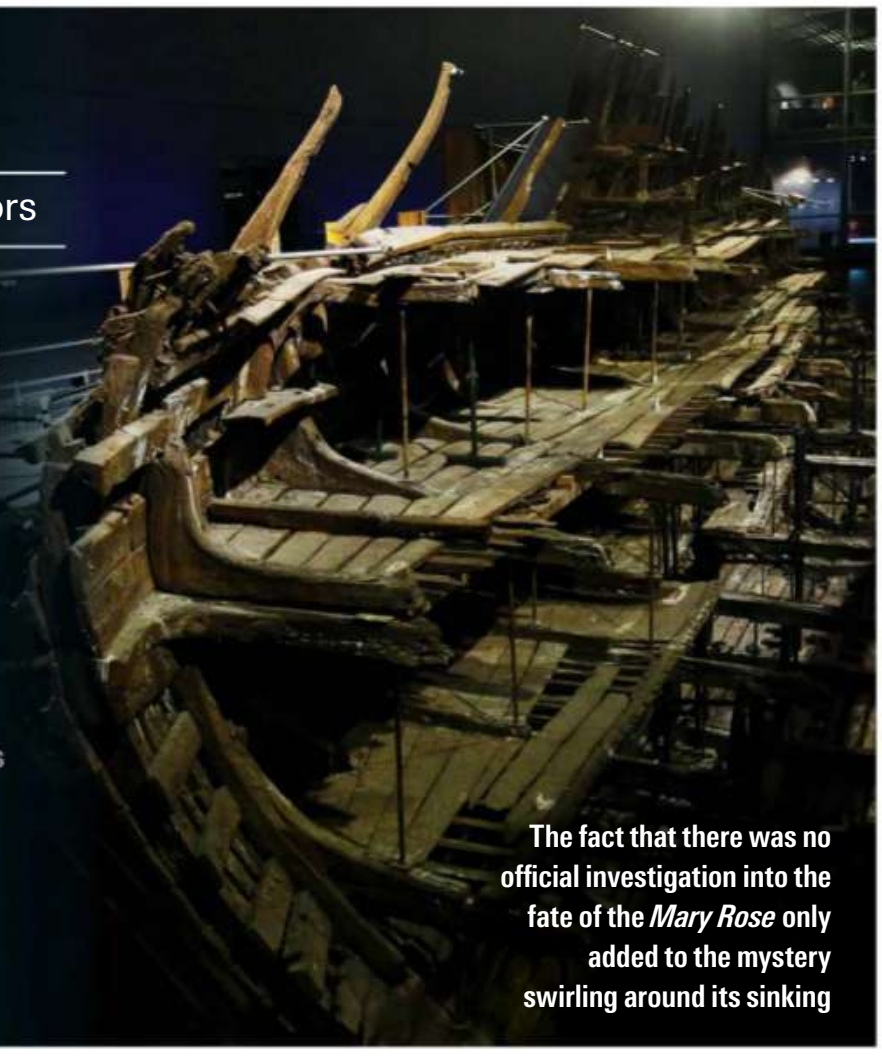
6 An unlucky mix

Maritime accidents are often caused by several factors

Speculation over the years since the *Mary Rose* disappeared beneath the waves has ranged far and wide. "Over the centuries, historians have come up with many different reasons for what happened on 19 July 1545," says Christopher Dobbs. "The sheer number of theories has proved a real problem when talking about the cause of the sinking."

In reality, it is likely that a combination of factors had a part to play in the *Mary Rose*'s demise. "In most maritime accidents," explains Dominic Fontana, "it's a whole sequence of events that come together at a particular point, causing the ship to become overwhelmed by the circumstances." However, we will probably never know exactly how these factors combined to doom the vessel.

"One thing is for certain," says Fontana. "Henry VIII watched the *Mary Rose* sink, which is likely why there wasn't an official investigation conducted into the cause." In other words, Henry had seen all he needed to. But his lack of response has helped shroud the *Mary Rose* in a mystery that continues to torment researchers to this day.



The fact that there was no official investigation into the fate of the *Mary Rose* only added to the mystery swirling around its sinking

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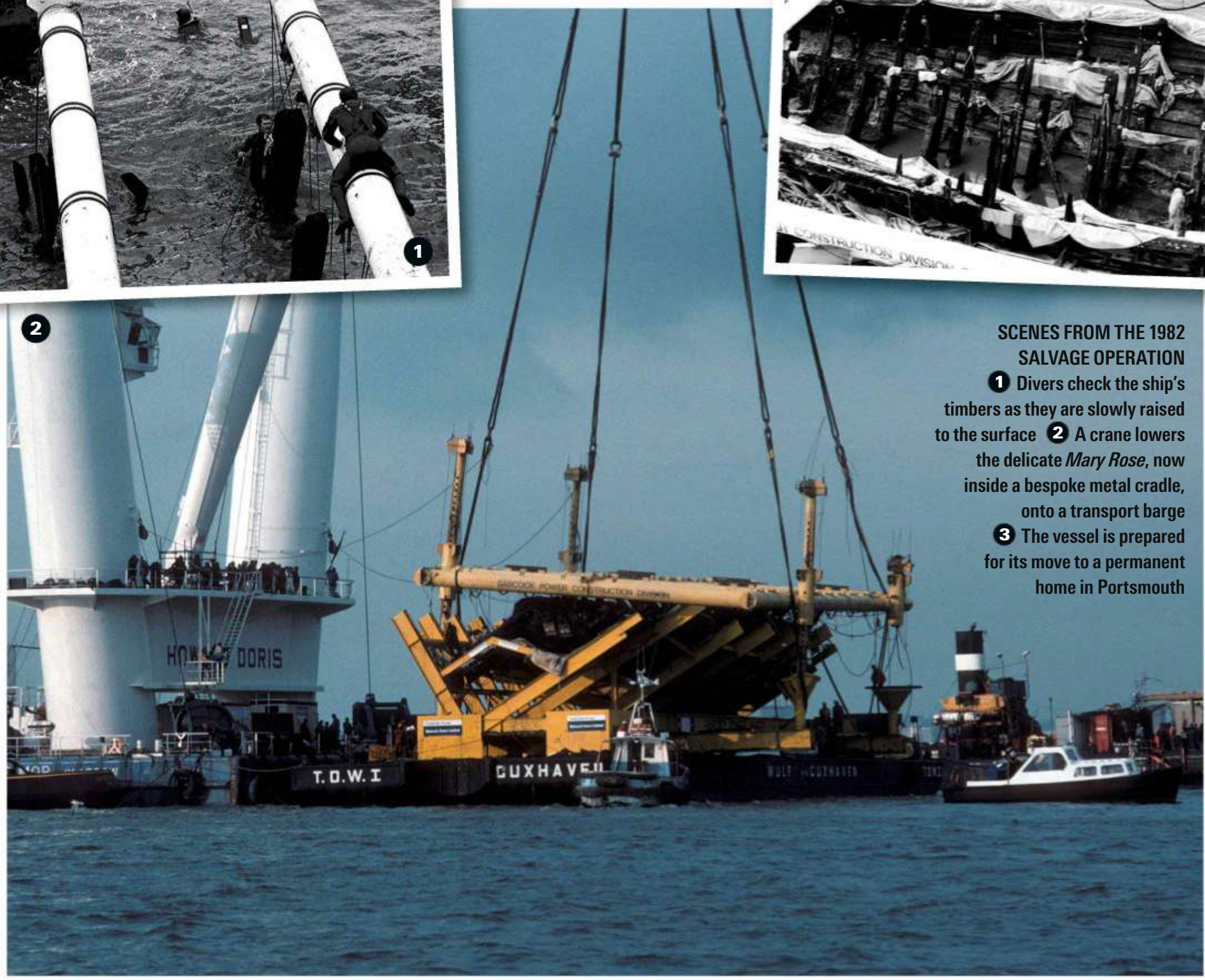


SCENES FROM THE 1982 SALVAGE OPERATION
1 Divers check the ship's timbers as they are slowly raised to the surface 2 A crane lowers the delicate *Mary Rose*, now inside a bespoke metal cradle, onto a transport barge 3 The vessel is prepared for its move to a permanent home in Portsmouth

Bringing back the *Mary Rose*

Forty years ago, the Tudor warship was raised from the seabed after a long and impressive team effort

On 11 October 1982, the fragile wooden frame of the *Mary Rose* emerged from the murky waters off the coast of Portsmouth. It was a momentous occasion, broadcast globally and met with cheers from excited bystanders watching along the city walls. This daring feat was the culmination of over 17 years of hard work by a huge team of divers, archaeologists and scientists.

Attempts to recover the *Mary Rose* had begun almost immediately after its sinking. In 1546, a team led by the Italian salvage operator Piero Corsi (and including an African diver called Jacques Francis) retrieved several items from the wreck. Other early efforts to raise the boat stalled when several masts broke, and the rescuers failed to pull the ship upright.

On 10 June 1836, the *Mary Rose* was found once again by Henry Abbinett, who came across an old timber and a gun when he was investigating snagged fishermen's nets. Two divers, John Deane and William Edwards, were asked to investigate. They dug holes and used shells as explosive charges to penetrate the silt, marketing any objects they found to museums or auctioning them. When the salvage costs outweighed their income from it, they abandoned the project.

The modern search for the *Mary Rose* began with Alexander McKee and Project Solent Ships in 1965. The self-funded team hired fishing boats and used members of Southsea Sub-Aqua Club and Southampton Sub-Aqua Club. When they discovered the potential resting place in 1966, it was still under metres of mud. "It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, but on the seabed, underwater," says Christopher Dobbs, who participated in the dive to salvage the wreck.

In the winter of 1970–71, several timbers were exposed, revealing the *Mary Rose* itself

"It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, but on the seabed, underwater"

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

The *Mary Rose* lay on the seabed at a 60° angle, so it had to be righted slowly and carefully. The task was completed in 1985 – and toasted with champagne

One of the professional divers shows off a gold Tudor coin found at the *Mary Rose* wreck site. Both silver and gold coins were discovered on the ship

TOPFOTO/GETTY IMAGES

Ornate oak panelling from the *Mary Rose* has been painstakingly conserved to prevent the wood, covered by mud for centuries, from disintegrating

for the first time in more than 400 years. "Fortunately, McKee was extremely responsible," says Dobbs. "Instead of digging for treasure straight away, he engaged archaeologist Dr Margaret Rule, who helped them work to the best principles." They gradually exposed the outside edges of the wreck first and proved they had discovered the substantial remains of a Tudor warship.

The Mary Rose Trust was formed in early 1979, with the aim of raising the ship so it could be displayed in Portsmouth "for the education and benefit of the nation". Soon the excavation process began. Archaeologists dug in the dark through the modern layers of silt right back to those from the 16th century, using newly invented techniques.

By the end of 1981, the *Mary Rose* was practically empty. The next challenge was raising the shipwreck, a conundrum solved by engineer John Grace. An underwater lifting frame was placed over the wreck, supported on legs placed in holes dug into the seabed. Tunnels were dug under the hull, enabling the divers to place backing plates below the hull attached to bolts through the hull and wires that went up to the lifting frame.

The wreck was transferred, underwater, to a huge cradle. It was then lifted slowly, so that the first few inches of the raising was done over days rather than seconds. This enabled the suction effect of the mud underneath to be broken. "It was like when a child steps in a muddy puddle," says Dobbs, "the water squirms around their boot causing it to get stuck and left behind."

Even 40 years on, the moment the *Mary Rose* came to the surface stands out in Dobbs's memory, as for many others involved. "What many people remember was watching it on live television. But I think that's actually when we realised what we'd achieved. It's that proof of the public reaction that says what an amazing adventure and feat of human endeavour it was. It really was a good news story." H

Emily Briffett is a journalist and podcaster who is presenting our new podcast series, *The Mary Rose: Secrets of a Tudor Warship* (*historyextra.com/podcast*). She has also worked as a guide at the Mary Rose Museum

An episode of **Witness History** on BBC World Service explores the salvage of the ship *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3csv28q*

The **Mary Rose Museum** is home to the wreck of the *Mary Rose* and is located in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard *maryrose.org*

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

When and why did British and American accents diverge?

By the mid-18th century, British commentators had noticed "barbarous" words (Francis Moore, 1735) and "the trace of corruption" (Samuel Johnson, 1756) in American English. And after the war for independence (1775–83), American patriots worried that US regional accents would be a barrier to national harmony. However, at this point, there wasn't a clear distinction between American and British English, and this lack of national accent differentiation was a particular problem for American sailors. They looked and sounded British enough that Royal Navy press gangs could claim them as deserters, a contributing factor in the War of 1812.

Across Britain, English speakers had different accents, which might have sounded more or less like the accents in America. But in the late 18th century, a new kind of accent started to take hold among the upper-class and educated, later called Received Pronunciation (RP). RP sounds came to be thought of as "standard", and the original, regional accents as "deviations" from that standard. Aspects of RP, like the "broad a" sound in *car* or *bath*, started to spread into the regions.

Meanwhile, Americans mostly weren't taking on RP, despite its status in England. Migration and immigration meant that different English and "foreign" accents were mixing in America, and so American regional accents lost their edges, to the point where they seemed more similar to each other and less similar to British. These differences will have been noticeable in the first half of the 19th century, and they continue to diverge today.

M Lynne Murphy, professor of linguistics at the University of Sussex

This 1884 painting, *In the Land of Promise*, shows the US's first official immigrant centre, in New York. By this point, British and American accents had diverged significantly

GETTY IMAGES

ILLUSTRATION BY **@GLENMCILLUSTRATION**

Why are the Yeomen of the Guard called Beefeaters?

Nobody knows for sure, and over the years various explanations have been offered. Perhaps it originated in an Old English term for servant, or from the French *buffetier*, meaning a sort of waiter (one of the Beefeaters' original roles was to attend the monarch at mealtimes).

The best explanation is probably the obvious one: that the Yeomen of the Guard, originally formed in Tudor times, received beef from the court table. An Italian visitor in the time of Charles II noted that they were called "beef-eaters" for this reason. Some might have applied the term ironically or even in envy of their hearty rations.

People often confuse the Yeoman of the Guard (the monarch's bodyguard) with the Yeoman Warders at the Tower of London, who are actually a separate military corps. Both however are popularly known as Beefeaters.

Eugene Byrne, visiting research fellow at the University of the West of England

Chinchorro mummies, on show in the San Miguel de Azapa Archaeological Museum, are among the world's oldest, dating back 4,000–7,000 years

Where and when did people first start mummifying their dead?

Try and think of two or three things that make ancient Egypt stand out from other cultures and there's a good chance "mummies" will be on your list. The word derives from the medieval Arabic *mumiyah*, and was adopted by the European travellers who began to visit Egypt in early modern times.

Mummification probably arose in Egypt as a result of the ancients' observation that the arid desert climate led to the natural preservation of soft tissue, and subsequently that the application of certain techniques could enhance the results. The earliest evidence for deliberate mummification in Egypt dates to 3,700–3,500 BC, several centuries before the first pharaohs.

Over time the process evolved as the Egyptians attempted to perfect it, and it varied according to the wealth and social status of the deceased. Thousands of mummies have survived, often exceptionally well, some belonging to historically significant individuals including the pharaohs Seti I, Ramesses the Great and, famously, Tutankhamun.

The ancient Egyptians mummified animals as well as people, including this dog and cat

Mummification was also practised in a wide variety of cultures around the world in Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania and the Americas. In fact the earliest evidence of intentional mummification pre-dates the oldest Egyptian mummy: the Chinchorro people of northern Chile mummified their dead for more than 3,000 years beginning in the late sixth or fifth millennium BC. Even earlier, 9,400 years ago, the body of a male was buried in Spirit Cave, Nevada, US, and was partially mummified.

Chris Naunton, Egyptologist, writer and broadcaster

Turn to page 90 for our piece considering the ethics of displaying mummies in museums

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

DID YOU KNOW...?

Curious collection

An 18th-century Chelsea coffee-house had on display, among many more curious items, "an elf's arrow", "a sea-horse's pizzle", "a piece of a nun's skin", "Queen Elizabeth's work-basket" and "a pair of drawers of a Chinese lady". The coffee-house, Don Saltero's, was run by James Salter, ex-valet to the great collector Sir Hans Sloane, who shared his former master's interest in curios. Not everything may have been what he claimed, but Don Saltero's collection became one of the sights of London.

Lifelong commitment

Jean I, king of France, ascended the throne the moment he was born on 15 November 1316 and reigned for five days, dying on the 20th of the same month. He thus became the only French king to hold the title for his entire life. Known as *Le Posthume* (the Posthumous), Jean was born five months after the death of his father, King Louis X. The cause of Jean I's own death is unknown, although it was rumoured he had been poisoned.

Sharing the spoils

At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, two Japanese pole-vaulters, Sueo Ōe and Shuhei Nishida, friends as well as rivals, were tied for second place. They refused to participate in a tie-breaker and it was decided to award the silver medal to Nishida, the bronze to Ōe. When the men returned home, they cut their medals in half, fusing the two different halves together to create medals that were half silver and half bronze. These became known as "The Medals of Friendship".

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

Japanese pole-vaulters Shuhei Nishida and Sueo Ōe tied for second place in the 1936 Olympic Games

A German soldier captured during the battle of Kursk, July–August 1943. Germany's last major offensive on the eastern front ended in crushing defeat

THE BITTER END

The shattered remains of the Reichstag in the wake of the Soviet assault on Berlin, 1945. In the final months of the war, many Germans carried on resisting out of fear of what would happen to them at the hands of the Red Army

GETTY IMAGES/AKG-IMAGES/DREAMSTIME

Members of the *Volkssturm* in Berlin, 1945. Some 175,000 members of this militia, consisting of men previously deemed too young or too old to fight, had died by the end of the war

The final months of the Second World War witnessed the slow strangulation of the Third Reich, as Hitler's increasing detachment from reality condemned millions of his compatriots to death. **Richard J Evans** charts the bloody collapse of Nazi Germany

Accompanies the BBC Two series **Fall of the Nazis**

BBC TWO

Hitler talks to a member of the Hitler Youth in March 1945. This was to be one of the final times that the dictator would emerge from his bunker below the Reich Chancellery

Spiralling fortunes German troops engaged in street-fighting, Stalingrad, 1942. Defeat here would precede more than two years of military reversals on the eastern front

Would-be killer Claus von Stauffenberg (left). His failed plot to assassinate Hitler in July 1944 solidified the dictator's suspicions that he was surrounded by cowards and traitors

Missing miracle A V1 flying bomb (pictured in France, 1944), one of the numerous "miracle weapons" that failed to turn the tide of the war

In 1943 the fortunes of war began to turn against Nazi Germany. Early that year, the battle of Stalingrad – widely hailed as a turning point in the Second World War – inaugurated a long, steady advance by the Red Army on the eastern front. This was interrupted only briefly by the battle of Kursk, the largest tank battle in history, which the Germans lost comprehensively.

In the south, Hitler's Italian ally, Mussolini, was deposed in July 1943 after Allied forces landed in Sicily. The Germans now felt obliged to occupy mainland Italy, diverting much-needed troops from the east, but were steadily beaten back by the Allies from September onwards. The end of July saw the mass bombing of Hamburg, with the damage inflicted on German cities by Allied raids becoming ever more severe.

All the while, morale on the home front began to fall, and the Nazi Party, the Gestapo and the SS started to tighten the screws of the repression that had played such an important part in creating the regime in the first place. Active Nazis rejoiced in the return, as they saw it, of the "time of struggle", the old days before the Third Reich was securely established, when they were fighting against their enemies, real or imagined, on all sides.

By 1944 growing numbers of middle-ranking army officers, backed by a few more senior figures, had become so despairing of victory that they were plotting to remove Hitler and sue for peace – a futile enterprise, since the Allies had agreed to demand unconditional surrender early the previous year. On 20 July 1944, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg detonated a time-bomb in Hitler's eastern headquarters, but it didn't kill the Nazi dictator and the coup failed.

Already suspicious of the armed forces and contemptuous of their leadership, Hitler now lost all faith in them. They were either cowards or traitors. Willpower was what mattered in his view, willpower would conquer everything, and willpower was precisely what they lacked.

The Nazi Party, SS and Gestapo tightened the screws of the repression that had helped create the regime in the first place

A failed miracle

In a desperate attempt to shore up morale, the manufacture of "miracle weapons" was trumpeted by Joseph Goebbels' propaganda apparatus, including nerve gases, flying bombs, ground-to-air missiles, rockets, air-conditioned submarines and even an atom bomb. Hitler placed particular faith in the effects of a jet-engine fighter plane, the Messerschmitt Me 262, but it had little impact on fighting before the end of the war.

These projects dissipated resources too widely, and depended on supplies of raw materials that were already drying up. Hitler ordered a concentration on the V1 flying bomb and the V2 rocket, but they could not be manufactured in sufficient quantities to have a major impact. Moreover, the fact that the "V" stood for *Vergeltung*, "retribution", amounted to a confession that they were unlikely to change the course of the war.

AKG-IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

Act of futility
A poster exhorts Germans to hold the line against the Red Army in the city of Frankfurt an der Oder. Sending boys and old men into battle was "largely pointless except as a propaganda exercise"

Keeping the faith
Hitler pictured in July 1944 with his chief propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, who stayed loyal to the führer until the end

For a while, however, they gave at least some encouragement to Hitler's faithful that the tide could still be turned. The public, as the SS reported, were increasingly sceptical.

In these final months, Hitler looked to history for inspiration. The call-up of men previously exempted from military service, above all because they were too young or too old, into the *Volkssturm* (People's Storm) deliberately echoed the legendary popular mobilisation in Prussia against Napoleon. The official date for the launch of the *Volkssturm*, 18 October 1944, was the anniversary of Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig in 1813.

Goebbels also commissioned and released an expensive new colour movie, *Kolberg*, telling the fictionalised story of a decision by the people of a town besieged by Napoleon to fight on to the bitter end whatever the cost. It was an implicit invitation to the Germans of Hitler's day to sacrifice themselves in what was claimed to be the national interest. It had little impact, since it had a very limited release. It also wasted precious resources of manpower for the military scenes, which involved thousands of men who might otherwise have been fighting at the front. The *Volkssturm* itself, poorly equipped and badly trained, was largely pointless except as a propaganda exercise: 175,000 men and boys were killed before the war came to an end.

On 16 December 1944, Hitler attempted a last throw of the dice, launching a fresh offensive in the west, where he believed that he could repeat the triumph of 1940 in the Ardennes – another piece of historical wishful thinking. Some 200,000 troops and large quantities of armour and equipment were transferred here, largely from the eastern front.

When Hitler's acting army chief of staff, Heinz Guderian, told him that the situation on the eastern front was at breaking point, and that it was folly to divert troops to the west, the dictator screamed: "You don't need to lecture me! I've been leading the German armies in the field for five years… I'm better informed than you are!" If the troops believed in victory, Hitler told his adjutant Nicolaus von Below, then victory would be theirs.

To begin with, the German armies scored some successes, enthusing Hitler with a fresh confidence, before the overwhelming superiority of the Allies brought them to a halt. The net effect in the end was to weaken the German defences in the east. After the Ardennes offensive was broken, Hitler told Below: "I know the war is lost. The enemy's superiority is too great." He had been let down by the Luftwaffe and betrayed by traitors in the army. "We won't surrender, never. We can go under. But we'll take a world with us." Death and destruction were all he could think of in his hour of despair.

Conspiracy theories

As one defeat followed another, Hitler began to isolate himself from the German masses, ceasing his visits to the front and refusing to go to the cities to talk to the civilians who had been bombed out of their homes. Once more, he blamed everything that had, in his mind, gone wrong with Germany since the First World War on "the Jewish-international global conspiracy", in which latterly Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill had been no more than willing puppets.

He still insisted on continued uncompromising resistance. When

Going down fighting
Horst Caspar in the Nazi film *Kolberg* (1945), a fictionalised version of that town's fight against Napoleon's forces

AKG-IMAGES/ALAMY

Warsaw was evacuated by the retreating German army, he lost his temper and had the staff officers who had issued the retreat signals arrested by the Gestapo. A crack SS division, the *Leibstandarte*, suffered heavy losses in its defence of the Hungarian oilfields, and was rewarded for its defeat by Hitler's sending SS chief Himmler to strip its surviving soldiers of their armbands, a very public humiliation that caused some of the troops to shoot themselves.

Hitler did not care. By insisting on fighting to the end, he sacrificed the lives of millions of his soldiers. More than a third of all German troops killed during the war died in January to May 1945, when it was clear to most Germans that the war was already lost.

Death from above

The destruction of German towns and cities from the air was turning more and more of them into heaps of rubble. Power cuts and water shortages became more frequent with the destruction of gas and electricity generating plants, power lines and underground pipes. More than half a million civilians were killed in the raids. Living conditions began to worsen. In the autumn of 1944, for the first time, the Nazi authorities began to make serious reductions of food and other rations. The supply situation steadily deteriorated from now on, and was not to recover until many months after the end of the war.

On 19 March 1945, Hitler issued the infamous "Nero order", commanding local authorities and plant managers to destroy their facilities in the face of the Allied advance in order to prevent them from being used by the enemy. The order, however, was widely disobeyed by local authorities, encouraged by armaments minister Albert Speer. After reading a memorandum Speer had presented to him rejecting the order because the German people would need the basic necessities if they were to survive after the war, Hitler told him that it was not necessary to worry about the German people, "for the nation has proved to be the weaker, and the future belongs solely to the stronger eastern nation. In any case only those who are inferior will remain after this struggle, for the good have already been killed."

In Berlin, the bombing of the Reich Chancellery on 3 February 1945, including Hitler's private apartments, forced him to move permanently into the bunker he had had constructed below. To begin with, he climbed the stairs to the garden quite frequently to walk his dog, Blondi, and on 20 March 1945 he went up to inspect and decorate a small detachment of Hitler Youth who had been defending the city. But as the Red Army moved into Berlin, it became too dangerous. On 20 April, his 56th birthday, he went up for the last time; a further attempt to come out, a week later, was frustrated by Soviet shelling.

Inside the bunker, the foul air and failing latrine system were beginning to make life unbearable. The celebration of Hitler's birthday in the bunker was muted, with Hitler himself participating only reluctantly. Outside on the surface, the dull thuds of Soviet artillery fire could already be heard, the noise penetrating through the thick concrete into the room.

By this time, Hitler had almost wholly lost touch with reality. He continued in his daily military conferences to move little flags representing army divisions around Berlin on a map, ordering a tank unit led by Felix Steiner, a senior SS officer, to launch a counter-attack, supported by aircraft and infantry, in which he expected that "the Russians will suffer the greatest defeat, the bloodiest defeat in their history before the gates of the city of Berlin".

But the troops and the tanks simply didn't exist. Told the attack had not taken place, Hitler lost all self-control, screaming that the army – and now, too, the SS – had betrayed him. Everything was lost, he cried, shaking with rage. Hermann Göring must negotiate a peace deal with the Allies. He would stay in the bunker and take his own life.

Informed by telephone of Hitler's breakdown, Goebbels moved into the bunker with his wife and children, determined to stay with him until the end, then create a heroic

More than a third of all German troops killed during the war died in January to May 1945, when it was clear that the conflict was lost

Coming up for air
In early spring 1945, Hitler regularly walked his German shepherd, Blondi, around the Chancellery garden. But Soviet shelling soon made such walks all but impossible

Carpet bombing
People pick their way through the ruins of Hamburg following Allied bombing, 1943. More than half a million civilians were killed in Germany by air-raids during the war

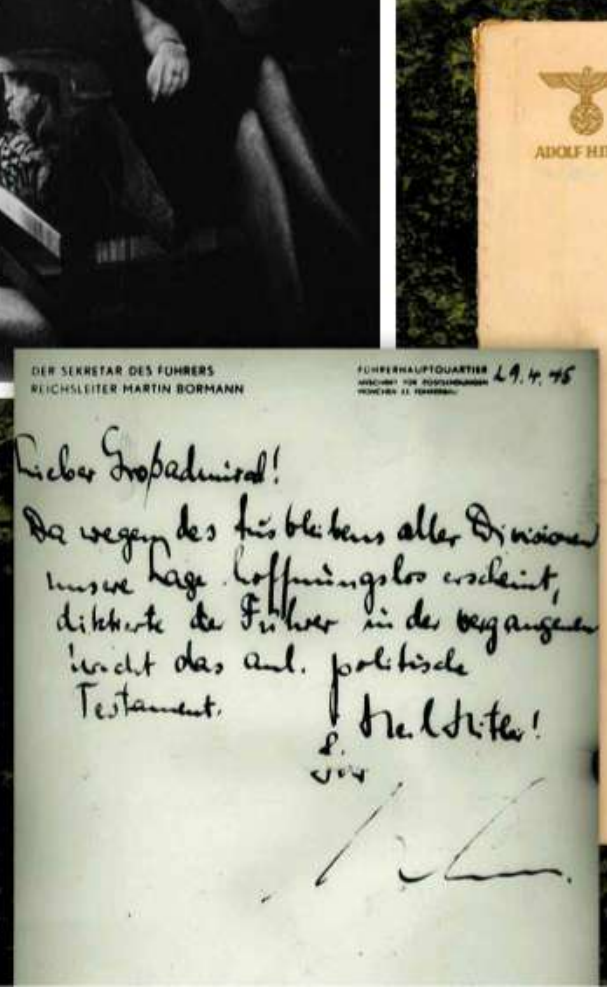
Prime target
The bombed-out Reich Chancellery, which housed Hitler's official residence in Berlin. In January 1945, the Soviet onslaught forced him to move to his bunker below

GETTY IMAGES/AKG-IMAGES

The last rites
Troops run through Berlin during the storming of the Reichstag in April 1945. Despite looming defeat, there was no mass rising against the Nazi regime

United in death
Hitler with Eva Braun in c1940. The couple married in the Berlin bunker on 29 April 1945. The following day, they killed themselves

Downfall documented
BELOW (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): Nazi official Martin Bormann relays Hitler's last political statement to Grand Admiral Dönitz in a letter dated 29 April 1945; Hitler's political testament, signed that same day; the American military newspaper *The Stars and Stripes* announces the führer's death on 2 May


DER SEKRETAR DES FÜHRERS
REICHSLEITER MARTIN BORMANN

FÜHRERHAUPTQUARTIER 29.4.45

Lieber Großadmiral!

Da wegen des Ausbleibens aller Divisionen unsere Lage hoffnungslos erscheint, diktierte der Führer in der vergangenen Nacht das anl. politische Testament.

Heil Hitler!

Ihr sehr

ADOLF HITLER

Mein politisches Testament.

Seit ich 1914 als Freiwilliger meine bescheidene Kraft im ersten, das Reich aufgezwungenen Weltkrieg einsetzte, sind nunmehr über dreissig Jahre vergangen.

In diesen drei Jahrzehnten haben mich bei all meinem Denken, Handeln und Leben nur die Liebe und Treue zu meinem Volk bewegt. Sie gaben mir die Kraft, schwerste Entschlüsse zu fassen, wie sie bisher noch keinem Sterblichen gestellt wurden sind. Ich habe meine Zeit, meine Arbeitskraft und meine Gesundheit in diesen drei Jahrzehnten verbraucht.

Es ist unwahr, dass ich oder irgendjemand anderer in Deutschland den Krieg im Jahre

EXTRA THE STARS AND STRIPES EXTRA

HITLER DEAD

Fuehrer Fell at CP, German Radio Says; Doenitz at Helm, Vows War Will Continue

Churchill Hints Peace Is at Hand

AKG-IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

How the Soviets turned the tide
To read Richard J Evans's take on why Hitler lost the war on the eastern front, go to *historyextra.com/eastern-front-ww2*

myth, just as he had tried to do after Stalingrad, of self-sacrifice for posterity.

Hitler's breakdown on 22 April 1945 inaugurated the final act in the squalid and pointless drama being played out in the bunker. At last, the spell broken, his lieutenants, with the exception of Goebbels, began to desert him. Told of Hitler's rant, Göring sent a telegram to Berlin assuming his rights as his nominated successor unless he heard otherwise. Hitler had already lost faith in him because of the failure of the Luftwaffe, and now he reacted by instructing the Reich Marshal to resign all his offices. Within a few hours, Göring was under house arrest, an SS unit stationed outside his house.

Worse than any of this, Hitler discovered that SS chief Heinrich Himmler had been negotiating with neutral Sweden behind his back for Germany's surrender to be conveyed to the Allies. Declaring this to be "the most shameful betrayal in human history", Hitler dismissed him from all his offices.

Death in a bunker

On 29 April 1945, after being shown photographs of Benito Mussolini's corpse, hanging upside-down from a petrol station gantry next to that of his mistress, Clara Petacci, Hitler told his staff over dinner that he was determined to avoid a similar fate. His body was to be burned until no trace of it remained, he said. Summoning a local Berlin official to the bunker, he now underwent a formal, legal ceremony of marriage with Eva Braun. Dictating his last will and testament, he appointed Grand Admiral Dönitz as his successor, and blamed the bombing of German cities on the Jews, who he believed were steering the Allies from behind. They had been forced to "expiate their guilt, though through more humane means". Such an admission expressed an entirely mistaken belief that the gas chambers of Auschwitz and other extermination camps were a "humane" method of killing, as well as a feeling of triumph that he had exacted on the Jews what he imagined to be a justified revenge.

Privately, Hitler admitted to his secretary Traudl Junge that "National Socialism is dead". Unrestrained in his boundless egotism, he told her that the Germans had not been ready to carry out the tasks he had allotted to them.

On 30 April 1945, after saying farewell once more to his secretaries, Hitler retired with Eva to his study at half-past three in the afternoon. A few minutes later a single shot was fired. Gingerly opening the door, Hitler's valet, Heinz Linge, saw the dictator's lifeless body slumped on the sofa, blood oozing from a gunshot wound in his right temple. Eva Braun (now Hitler) was beside him, a strong smell of bitter almonds coming from her corpse. She had taken cyanide.

Prize catch Hermann Göring pictured in Allied captivity. The Nazi grandee had deserted Hitler in the final, squalid days of the Third Reich, a move that resulted in the SS placing him under house arrest

GETTY IMAGES

Linge and Hitler's adjutant, Otto Günsche, wrapped the bodies in blankets and, with the help of SS guards, carried them up the long staircases to the Reich Chancellery garden, where they doused them with petrol and set them alight. So thoroughly were the bodies burned that only the teeth remained among the ashes, later to be identified by a technician who had worked for Hitler's dentist.

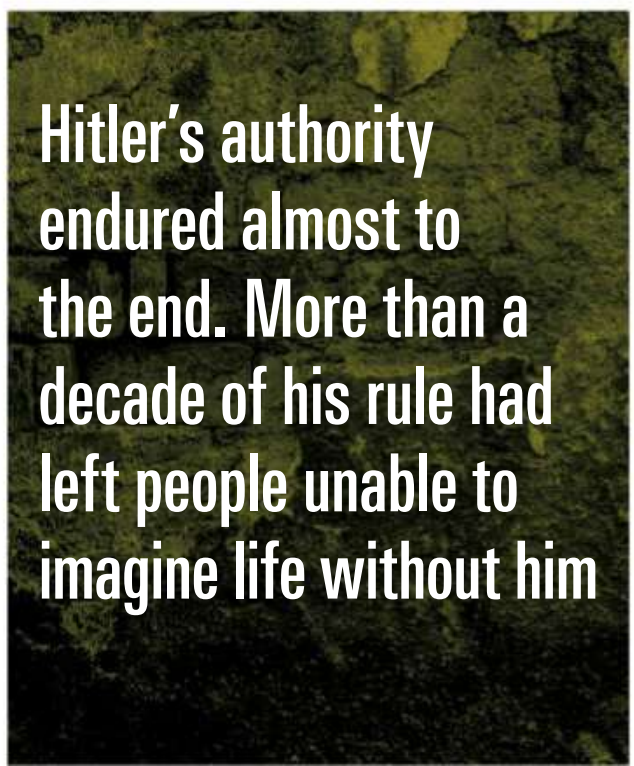
Public executions

Adolf Hitler left only death and destruction behind him. Many ordinary Germans had gradually lost faith in his regime as defeat followed defeat, and life in Germany's devastated cities had progressively become more difficult for them to sustain. Instead of being restored to greatness, as Hitler had proclaimed, the country lay in ruins.

Yet there had been no general rising against the regime. By the last months, any kind of dereliction of duty, open defeatism, or attempt to negotiate a local surrender to the advancing Allied forces incurred public execution at the hands of the SS and other fanatics. Many Germans carried on resisting the enemy out of fear of what might happen to them, justified enough in the case of the Red Army, whose troops carried out innumerable shootings and rapes of civilians as they advanced into Germany.

By 1945 most Germans were motivated above all by nationalism, the feeling that what they were defending was their country rather than the Nazi regime that had taken it over. Civil servants and administrators continued with their daily bureaucratic routines more out of a sense of duty or ingrained habit than anything else.

Hitler's charismatic authority endured almost to the end. More than a decade of his rule had left people unable to imagine life without him – in thousands of cases literally so, as a huge wave of suicides rolled across Germany, particularly among government ministers, generals and Nazi Party officials. When Hitler's death became known, and the war ended, allegiance to the Third Reich among the people of Germany vanished almost overnight. H


Hitler's authority endured almost to the end. More than a decade of his rule had left people unable to imagine life without him

Sir Richard J Evans is Regius Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Cambridge, and a contributor to the BBC Two series *Fall of the Nazis*

Fall of the Nazis is due to begin on BBC Two from mid-October. You can also watch *Rise of the Nazis* on BBC iPlayer

BBC at 100 PART 11

In the eye of the storm

The past two decades have seen the BBC rocked by a series of scandals that raised questions about its culture and practices – and tested its relationship with politicians and the public alike. **DAVID HENDY** charts the revelations and their aftermath

Corporation in crisis
BBC employees arrive at work in October 2012, the month that *Panorama* broadcast details of sexual abuse committed by presenter Jimmy Savile across several decades. The ensuing scandal is among several to have emerged at the broadcaster in recent years

> "What began as a dispute over a single interview rapidly became a debilitating conflict over journalistic standards"

On the entrance to the BBC's London headquarters, Broadcasting House, there's an interesting Latin inscription that refers to broadcasting in the original biblical sense of scattering seed: "And they pray that good seed sown may bring forth good harvest, and that all things foul or hostile to peace may be banished thence, and that the people inclining their ear to whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, may tread the path of virtue and wisdom."

In the years since those words were inscribed, "things foul or hostile" have proved frustratingly hard to erase. And the BBC has been rocked by a number of scandals erupting from within its own portals. As *The Guardian*'s Charlotte Higgins observed, the BBC "is where the British gather to fight their most vicious culture wars… it has crisis in its bones". But some fights prove more damaging than others. And over the past two decades, a 24-hours-a-day media world has made it easier than ever for its opponents to amplify any mistakes – large and small. Nor has an increasingly nervy BBC always defended itself well against their attacks.

The first major crisis of the new century to hit the BBC concerned the invasion of Iraq by British and American forces, and precipitated a bitter falling out with Tony Blair's government. Hostilities opened on the morning of 29 May 2003 with a soon-to-be-infamous broadcast on Radio 4. Just after 6am, the *Today* programme's defence correspondent, Andrew Gilligan, took to the microphone to talk about the latest twist in the saga of Iraq's elusive "weapons of mass destruction" – weapons the government had suggested could be launched against British interests within 45 minutes, and which had therefore become a major justification for military intervention. Gilligan now suggested not just that the 45-minute figure mentioned in an intelligence dossier was wrong but that the government had *known* it was wrong. Worse, he claimed that Downing Street had ordered the same document to be "sexed up, to be made more exciting". In other words, a BBC correspondent was making the incendiary claim that the prime minister had deliberately misled the nation – and he made the claim on a breakfast programme that often set the day's news agenda for the national media.

The response from Downing Street's press operation, led by Alastair Campbell, was speedy and unrelenting. As well as denying the story outright, Campbell accused *Today* of basing its report on a single anonymous and uncorroborated source. With the BBC's director general, Greg Dyke, resolutely standing by Gilligan, what began as a dispute over a reporter's choice of words in a single interview rapidly blew up into a debilitating conflict over journalistic standards.

Several weeks later, Gilligan's source was revealed: David Kelly, the former UN weapons inspector. Soon after, Kelly went missing from his Oxfordshire home. And on Friday 18 July his body was found slumped against a tree: he had taken his own life. The subsequent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his death, led by Brian Hutton, the former Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, published its findings the following January. They contained devastating criticism of the *Today* programme's editorial processes: Gilligan's central allegations had been "unfounded" and the editorial system that allowed him to make his claims had been "defective". Within 24 hours, the BBC's chairman, Gavyn Davies, and the director general had both resigned, while a caretaker chairman, Richard Ryder, had apologised "unreservedly" for the BBC's failures.

There were plenty inside the BBC, especially in its news departments, who felt that the government and corporation had each overreacted. A 2004 government review suggested the intelligence on which the government relied had indeed been "seriously

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Media controversy
Protesters gather outside the Royal Courts of Justice during the 2003 Hutton inquiry into claims, broadcast on the BBC, that the case for war in Iraq had been "sexed up"

ALAMY/REUTERS

flawed" – a finding the Chilcot Inquiry would later reinforce. In the immediate aftermath of the row, Kevin Marsh, *Today*'s editor, pointed out that "very senior sources" had also confirmed many of the details in Gilligan's report. The BBC's man had been substantially right. He had also been prepared properly by his editorial team: it was merely his loose phrasing in the heat of a live conversation which had caused the problem.

Many fellow journalists feared a long-term chilling effect on the corporation's news instincts. Yet the BBC's former business editor, Robert Peston, later claimed he for one never "felt haunted by Hutton". Roger Mosey, who ran television news at the time, also described a subtle recalibration taking hold after Hutton: a BBC that was simply reasserting its commitment to higher standards of proof.

From the historian's point of view, what's perhaps most striking about this whole episode is what it reveals about the huge influence of newspaper values on BBC journalism during this period. There was a constant turnover of staff between Fleet Street and the corporation, and in the BBC's newsrooms a great deal of time and attention was devoted to perusing the press, especially the *Mail* and *Telegraph*. The result, according to the *Financial Times* journalist John Lloyd, had been not just a newspaper culture ravenous for conflict but also a BBC that had come to believe that "this was the way true journalists should behave". If so, the recalibration Mosey described was probably overdue.

Institutional failings

The 2012 row over Jimmy Savile also touched on journalistic standards. But it sent shockwaves well beyond the BBC's newsrooms.

When Savile's death was announced in October 2011, reporters on *Newsnight* were preparing an expose of his tawdry history of sexual abuse. Their investigation was then halted, leaving a team from ITV to broadcast the allegations a few months later. Had the corporation's senior executives intervened because a tribute show was also being planned for the Christmas schedules? Had they feared what would emerge about historical allegations of abuse committed by Savile at the BBC? Or was it both? Given the whiff of a cover-up and swirling rumours of sex offenders on the payroll, the BBC felt it had little option but to expose itself to some very public investigations.

The first of these, conducted by the former ITN journalist Nick Pollard, would eventually clear *Newsnight* and senior managers of

Giving evidence David Kelly, the source of the BBC's Iraq report, leaves parliament after giving evidence, 15 July 2003. He was found dead days later

Damning report Alastair Campbell arrives at the Hutton inquiry into Kelly's death, September 2003. Its findings were highly critical of the BBC

Toxic culture
Jimmy Savile (second from left) on the set of *Top of the Pops*, 1973. The presenter met some of his victims during the recording of the music show

improper attempts to suppress the truth. The real issue, Pollard concluded, had been an editorial decision that set the bar of proof too high by insisting that the testimony of those women who were Savile's victims was not in itself sufficient for the BBC to proceed.

By now, the crisis had escalated horribly. In what appeared to be an attempt to prove its commitment to robust investigative journalism, *Newsnight* alleged that a senior Conservative had been involved in child abuse. He wasn't named, but speculation on social media soon identified him as the former Tory party treasurer Lord McAlpine. Unfortunately, it was a case of mistaken identity: McAlpine was innocent. Within days, the director general, George Entwistle – just weeks into the job – had been forced to resign. Meanwhile, the chairman, Chris Patten, talked publicly about "a tsunami of filth" engulfing the corporation.

A second investigation saw High Court judge Dame Janet Smith spend nearly four years interviewing more than 380 witnesses. Her findings, published in 2016, revealed that a catalogue of sexual assaults had indeed taken place. She identified more than 70 allegations of inappropriate conduct or sexual assault, many of them associated with TV shows *Top of the Pops* and *Jim'll Fix It*. There had been no institutional cover-up, she concluded, but those who had witnessed Savile's behaviour had repeatedly failed to pass on complaints. Staff had been more concerned with damage to the BBC's reputation than victims' welfare.

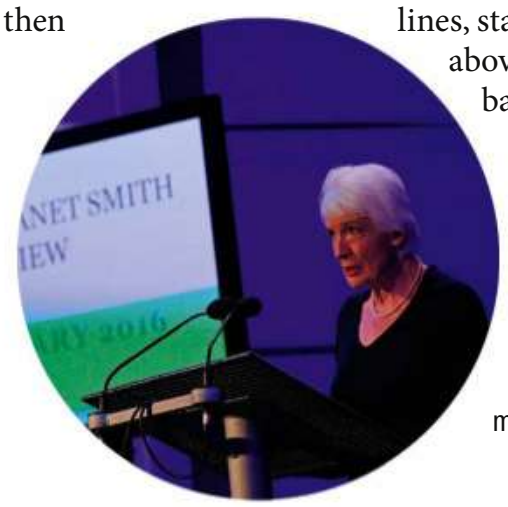
> "Staff had been more concerned with damage to the BBC's reputation than about the welfare of the victims"

Moral danger

The account of witness "C16" was all too typical. She was just 16 years old in 1969, and had been in the *Top of the Pops* studio dancing next to Savile when he attacked her. When she complained to a member of the studio floor staff, she was told she must have been mistaken and escorted off the premises. On other occasions complainants were told to keep their "mouth shut" or that Savile had just been "mucking about".

The DJ would often meet his victims at the recording of a show and then entice them away from BBC premises in order for the abuse to take place elsewhere. But he would also "gratify himself sexually" at Television Centre, Radio 1's offices at Egton House, and other regional centres. These, Smith said, had become places where young people were "at risk of moral danger".

Taking a legalistic approach, Smith decided the BBC as a corporate entity could only have been guilty of a cover-up if heads of department or those above had been aware of specific allegations and done nothing. This, she said, was not the case. There had been plenty of gossip, and several junior staff had clearly been aware of Savile's actions. But none of the complaints – even those from the BBC's own staff – were fully documented or passed up the chain of command. Such lack of concern was not uncommon at the time, but a destructive "macho culture", especially among the BBC's technical staff and TV light entertainment, had been revealed. In the following years there would have to be wholesale reform behind the scenes: better child protection and whistleblowing guidelines, staff awareness training, and, above all, a healthier gender balance on the payroll.



Grim reading
Dame Janet Smith makes a statement about sexual assaults carried out by Savile, 2016. Her report identified incidents across multiple decades and BBC premises

The BBC's two biggest recent scandals both seem so shocking, in part, because they concerned an organisation that its first director general, John Reith, had once imagined would set a new gold standard in corporate management. But while the rows surrounding both Gilligan and Savile undoubtedly raised profoundly serious issues – as did the scandal surrounding Martin Bashir's 1995 interview with Diana, Princess of Wales, and ongoing accusations of age discrimination at the corporation – they were also examples of an institution facing intense scrutiny and yet still committed to unusual levels of public accountability.

The BBC's initial response to embarrassing revelations has often been overly defensive. But principles of transparency have usually kicked in – sometimes to the point of painful self-excoriation. Perhaps more damaging to the corporation's image is the stream of less spectacular – and sometimes vexatious – disputes over editorial balance or lapses in taste.

In a creative organisation responsible for thousands of hours of output every week, mistakes are inevitable, and sometimes forgiveable. The BBC's difficulty is that it is these, as much as the more serious disputes, which continue to provide a rich vein of ammunition for any politician or commercial rival intent on weakening its public standing for their own benefit. H

David Hendy is emeritus professor of media and cultural history at the University of Sussex and author of *The BBC: A People's History* (Profile, 2022)

The BBC Two series **Days That Shook the BBC with David Dimbleby** is available to watch now on BBC iPlayer

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BOOKS

ROMANTICISM

"Caroline was a model for how to be in the world: adventurous, unafraid and thirsty for new ideas"

Daisy Hay lauds a book about a group of late 18th-century German thinkers › page 80

CHINA

"A rational set of policies would have led to the dismantling of the power of the Communist Party"

Robert Bickers is impressed by a detailed study of Chinese political history following the death of Mao Zedong › page 82

20TH CENTURY

"This is a reminder of the sheer dynamism of history, and of its fundamentally fluid nature"

Roger Moorhouse recommends an insightful analysis of 12 modern political giants › page 78

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"Lord Northcliffe fell out with David Lloyd George, and made even Winston Churchill tread warily"

Stephen Bates applauds a definitive new biography of a newspaper tycoon › page 81

INTERVIEW

Lucy Worsley on the life, loves and disappearance of crime writer Agatha Christie › page 74

FRAN MONKS/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

INTERVIEW / LUCY WORSLEY

"Agatha Christie's mysterious disappearance in 1926 was the central injustice of her life"

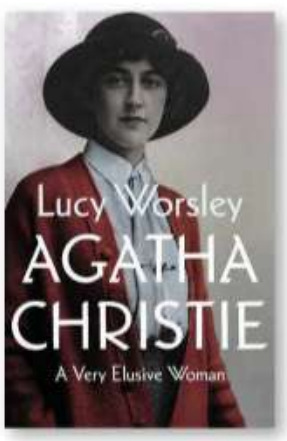
LUCY WORSLEY speaks to Rhiannon Davies about her new biography of the doyen of detective novels, Agatha Christie, and what her life and work reveals about the 20th century

Rhiannon Davies: Why have you decided to write about Agatha Christie for your new book?
Lucy Worsley: I have a bit of an obsession with detective fiction, and I'm also really interested in female writers, so I thought it would be fascinating to view Agatha's life through the eyes of a historian. And it was such a long life: she was born in 1890 and died in 1976. To me, her books aren't just entertainment – they're a record of the social history of the 20th century. So she's a genius, she's an artist, she's a creative – but she's also a representative woman of her time. A lot of the things that happened to other women in the 20th century happened to her.

How did her background inform her life and writing?
She was born into a family with money, and I think that's so important in understanding a lot of the things that happened to her later. Her father was American – so that gave her an international perspective on life right from the start. One of the things people get wrong about Agatha Christie is thinking she's quintessentially English; in reality, she was from a family of globetrotters.

They lived in Torquay, on the south coast of Devon, and Agatha had a very comfortable life in a Victorian villa. They had lots of money and a beautiful garden where, she tells us, she used to play with her imaginary friends. So she was making up stories from an early age.

What was expected of a woman of her social class at that time?
Get married. She described the philosophy of the people she knew in her childhood as waiting for "the man" who was going to come along and change your life. She had an older sister, Madge, who was sent to boarding school and given some of the values of what was called the "New Woman". This was a middle-class view of femininity: you should be educated, and break barriers, and go out into the world.



Agatha Christie: A Very Elusive Woman
by Lucy Worsley
(Hodder & Stoughton, 432 pages, £25)

Clearly, though, her parents didn't agree. They brought Madge home and put her on the marriage market. She got married – very successfully – to the heir to a Manchester business fortune, and ended up with a huge house. The idea was that Agatha herself would follow the same route – minus the inculcation with the values of the New Woman at boarding school.

Throughout her whole life, Agatha never spoke in favour of emancipation or women's capacity or anything like that. But, even though she didn't say she held feminist values, I think we can detect some of those ideas in her actions.

In what ways could she be seen as a feminist?
Throughout her life, Agatha kept up a public image that she wasn't a professional working writer – which, clearly, she was. She wrote roughly 80 books; 2 billion paper copies of her works have existed; she's sold more copies than any other book or writer except the Bible and Shakespeare. What strikes me is that, unlike God or Shakespeare, she's female. And that often gets weirdly glossed over.

That's partly her own doing. She never wanted to be taken seriously as a professional writer, partly because of the values of her childhood but also because of something very bad that happened to her in 1926. That year marked the great pivot point of Agatha's life, when she went through a huge episode of what we'd today call public shaming, which we'll return to later.

At the time, lots of newspaper articles were written about her in which her professional success was definitely a bad thing. So, after 1926, she never spoke of herself in those terms again. You'd think that on her passport she'd state her profession as writer or author – but it actually said she was a housewife.

You say that, in terms of her parents' expectations for her life, getting married was the biggest priority. So did her first marriage conform to social norms of the time?
She came on to the marriage market in trying circumstances: her father had died and the family had lost their money, so they were going downhill socially. Yet Agatha was still expected to try to marry up. She actually received nine proposals, sometimes dismissing them in the funniest ways. When one young man asked her to marry him, she said something like: "It's an awfully silly thing to ask a girl to marry like this. We've only known each other for 10 days – don't be such a fool."

But then along came the 10th man, Archibald Christie – Archie. He wasn't quite what her mother would have wanted, being from a slightly lower social class. In his favour, though, he was incredibly hot, and a pilot, and Agatha was head over heels with him. It's like the film *Top Gun,* except it happened in a country house in Devon in 1912.

There was a lot of toing and froing over whether they would get married, because neither of the families was particularly happy about what they saw as this slightly ill-matched couple. Perhaps they wouldn't have tied the knot had it not been for the First World War. Archie was sent off to France, and when he came home for Christmas after the first few months of the war, something had changed within

PROFILE

Lucy Worsley is chief curator at Historic Royal Palaces, and a broadcaster and bestselling author of books including *Queen Victoria* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2018) and *Jane Austen at Home* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2017).

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRAN MONKS

him, and he said: "We've got to get married at once." It was a very hasty wartime marriage, like many others. And, like many other hasty wartime marriages, it wasn't going to last that long.

What was Agatha's own experience of the First World War?
I don't think it's possible to overestimate just how important the First World War was in the creation of Agatha Christie as a person. With Archie away serving in France, she volunteered at the field hospital that had been set up in Torquay. She started at the bottom, washing the floors, and she later used this experience in her fiction; you find little snatches of her real life in so many of her novels. Then she progressed to actually treating patients, which was harrowing work. She describes having to take a man's amputated leg down to the furnace in the hospital for it to be burned, and how one of her patients died after three days in her personal care.

The trauma of war clearly affected men – everybody knows about shell-shock – but historians have realised recently that it affected women, too, in a way that nobody really wanted to talk about at the time. Even if the nurses weren't at the front line, they still experienced things that no nice young ladies like Agatha ever expected to witness – the naked, dirty and wounded bodies of young men, for instance. Then they had to go home to their families, but they could not distress them by describing what they'd seen. They had to keep this horror within the hospital. This act of containment – having a secret, being not quite what you seem from the outside – was essential to all of the characters Agatha went on to produce as a detective novelist.

Her time in the hospital was also particularly important because she trained as a pharmacist's assistant, taking a job in the part of the hospital where the medicines were mixed – this involved handling really dangerous, strong drugs. So Agatha was handling poisons, and it was during her time working in the pharmacy that she picked up a pen and started to write. One of the things she wrote, beginning in 1916, was her very first published detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* [which originally appeared in 1920]. And guess what?

Before the storm
Agatha Christie with her daughter, Rosalind, in 1924. Two years later, her mental health deteriorated and her personal life collapsed

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> **"One of the reasons for reading Agatha Christie is to understand how the racial politics of middle-class white people in Britain played out throughout the 20th century"**

It features a young lady who works in a hospital as a dispenser, and it features a death by poison.

Let's talk about 1926 and Agatha's 11-day disappearance, an episode that captured the nation's imagination. What was the background to her vanishing?
This mysterious disappearance of 11 days, which led to a national search for her – she was eventually found staying under a false name in a hotel in Harrogate – seems to be the central injustice of Agatha Christie's life. A lot of people would tell you that it happened because she wanted to frame her cheating husband for her murder. That's what the newspapers said at the time, and it's a narrative that's been picked up in so many other books about her.

When I started my research for this book, I was open to that suggestion. But it's not at all consistent with what I found in her personal archive and in the evidence from the time. What I believe happened was as different from that as night from day.

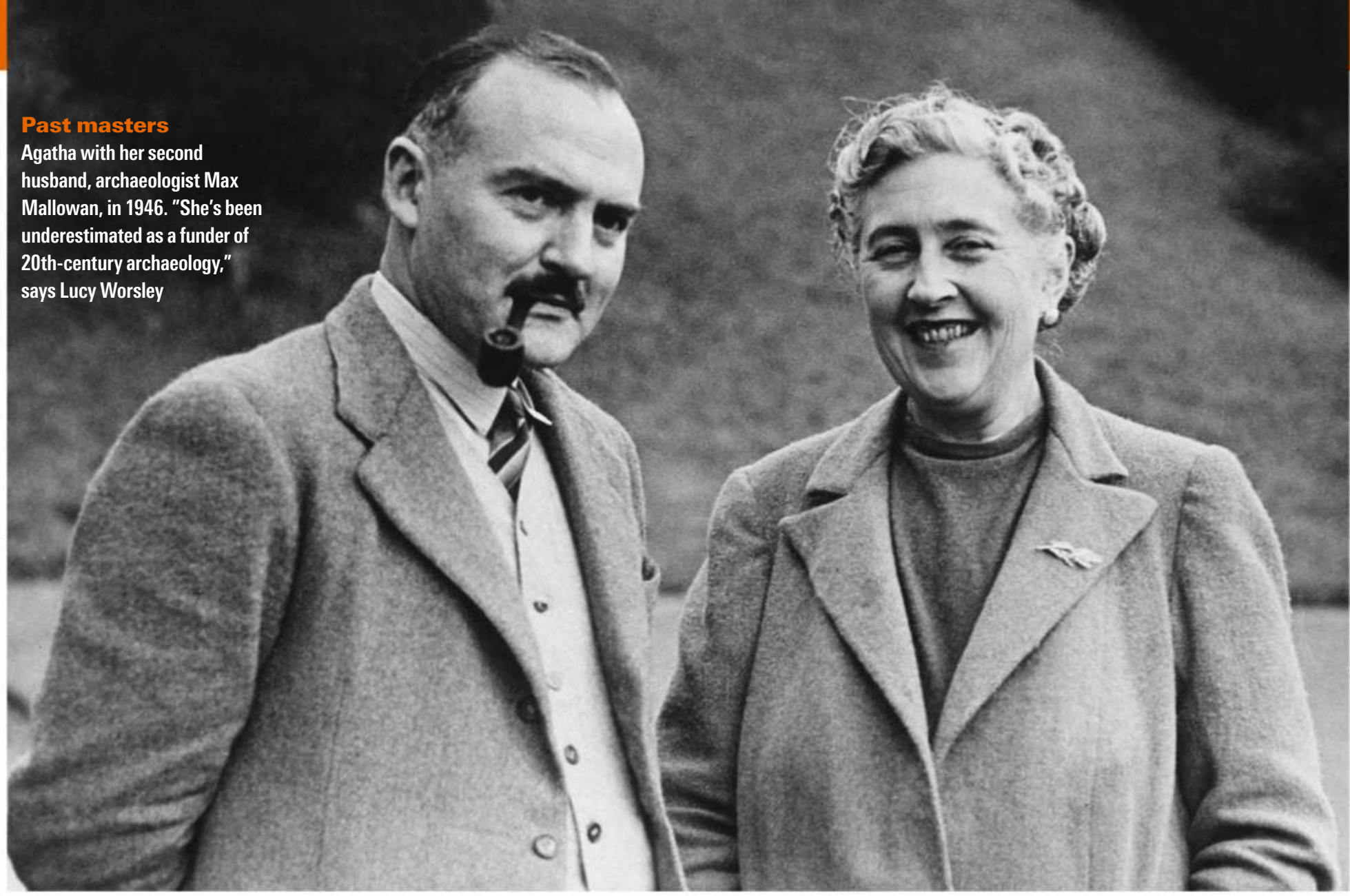
By 1926, Agatha was a successful novelist, and she was under a lot of pressure to keep producing books. But her mother died that year, and she went into an episode of what today would probably be described as depression. She reported forgetfulness, tearfulness, insomnia, an inability to cope with normal life. Unfortunately, it turned out that her husband, Archie, couldn't cope with this – he wasn't an emotionally literate man. And then he announced that he was leaving her for a woman called Nancy, who was nearly a decade younger than Agatha.

Agatha became very low and, on 3 December, her mental state became so bad that she considered suicide. She then entered, I believe, into a fugue state. Now, this is a very rare condition, and it causes you to step right outside your normal self and adopt another persona, so that you don't have to think about the trauma you've been experiencing in your current situation. She gave herself a new name and travelled to the town of Harrogate, which had a reputation for medical excellence. There she stayed at a health spa, where she tried to recover her lost health.

That's not framing your cheating husband for murder – that is living with a really serious mental-health condition. And yet the narrative is that she was somehow a bad person who was playing some sort of a trick on the world: perhaps she was doing it to frame the husband; perhaps she was doing it to get attention to sell novels.

Agatha then married an archaeologist, with whom she travelled extensively. What role did she play in 20th-century archaeology?
Agatha got a second chance at life and love when she met Max Mallowan. After they married in 1930, she spent part of each year on archaeological digs with him in Syria and Iraq.

One of the ways in which she's been underestimated is as a funder of 20th-century archaeology. She basically paid for Max's digs – partly to please him, partly because she found archaeology personally interesting, and partly because she enjoyed the life she was able to live on a dig, where she was treated as just another member of the team. She was famous for being very good at cleaning the finds, particularly



Past masters
Agatha with her second husband, archaeologist Max Mallowan, in 1946. "She's been underestimated as a funder of 20th-century archaeology," says Lucy Worsley

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the delicate ivories discovered in Iraq at the site of Nimrud, also known by the ancient name Kalhu. She would clean them with a little brush and some face cream.

Though that's a very striking image, it completely downplays the fact that she was there in the first place only because she'd provided the money for the expedition to happen. It was socially unacceptable then that she was a female breadwinner who was basically bankrolling her husband's career.

During her travels she met people of several different nationalities, but her work often mirrors prejudices held by many others in 20th-century Britain. How did those attitudes evolve and reflect changing ideas?

One of the reasons for reading Agatha Christie is to understand how the racial politics of middle-class white people in Britain played out throughout the 20th century. Her publishing history reflects that, too, because she was writing about the world of her first readers, who were in Britain and America – largely people who looked and sounded like her.

What you can see in her writing over the years is a gradual liberalising of views. Many people make the mistake of thinking that all of her stories are set in 1935 or thereabouts. That's largely down to the TV adaptations that aired on Sunday nights, which maybe your grandparents used to watch. Actually, her books span a much wider chronological period. After the Second World War, for example, her books feature more Iraqi characters.

In Agatha and Max's archaeological life, you can see them gradually coming to terms with the fact that the attitudes of prewar archaeology were no longer acceptable. Ideas about where finds from digs should eventually be kept changed over time. The whole history of 20th-century archaeology is captured in the life of Agatha Christie.

What happened at the end of her life?

It's amazing to think that Agatha Christie was still writing books into her eighties. Her publishers began to get a bit worried, because it was clear that the books weren't as good as they used to be. Weirdly, though, she'd become such a powerful brand by that point that it didn't matter. In the 1970s she published a book called *Passenger to Frankfurt*; I personally think it's bonkers – as did her publishers. But it was a huge hit, staying on the bestseller list for six months, so they had to apologise to her for doubting it.

The deterioration in the quality of the writing may have a sadder explanation – pretty heartbreaking, actually. If you analyse the language she's using in her later books, it becomes repetitive and a lot simpler. Other sources also suggest that she was entering into the early stages of dementia.

When Agatha did finally die, in 1976, it was possibly as easy as any death could be. She was being looked after by her (much younger) husband, Max; one day, after they'd eaten lunch together, she passed away very peacefully. The two of them are buried next to each other in the graveyard of St Mary's Church, Cholsey, near where they lived in Wallingford, Oxfordshire.

Why should historians be interested in her work and life?

Agatha Christie is worth studying because she's there in the background of our lives today. Someone who's such a cultural phenomenon is worth taking seriously and investigating.

I also think it's important because her life and her work provide a wonderful record of what white middle-class British people thought about things throughout the 20th century. It helps you understand where we are in the world today.

That's all on top of the fact that you can get huge pleasure and enjoyment from reading her books. Some of them are just works of art – they're exquisitely crafted machines for giving you pleasure and entertainment. H

Why is Agatha Christie so popular today?
Listen to an extended version of this interview with Lucy Worsley on our podcast at *historyextra.com/podcast*

Beginning of the end
Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev in Bonn, where in June 1989 he and West German chancellor Helmut Kohl signed a declaration signalling efforts "to build jointly a better future". Just months later, the Berlin Wall fell. "The influence of Gorbachev was decisive in steering the Soviet Union to its collapse in 1991," says Roger Moorhouse

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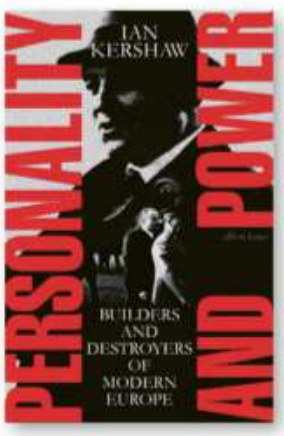
20TH CENTURY

To the power of one

ROGER MOORHOUSE applauds a masterful analysis of the lives, influences and impacts of a dozen pivotal European leaders of the 20th century



Personality and Power: Builders and Destroyers of Modern Europe
by Ian Kershaw
Allen Lane, 512 pages, £30

It's hard to imagine now, perhaps, but back in the mists of time much of our collective history output revolved around "Great Men". This was the idea that significant men – and they were always men – had forged history by their wit, cunning or the force of their personalities.

As might be expected, such antediluvian concepts have been largely discredited in recent decades. They've been submerged beneath the tide of impersonal forces – war, economics, demography, disease and so on – that are now conventionally thought to shape our history more consequentially than the individual. Yet, as this new book convincingly demonstrates, the role of the individual in history cannot be written off for good.

The new book by one of Britain's foremost academic historians is not a rehabilitation of Great Man theory – that would be crass. Rather, it is a thoughtful attempt to mark out a middle ground between two opposing positions. It's an examination of how far individuals can alter the course of history, and how far we are all merely the playthings of forces beyond our control.

Ian Kershaw wisely steers clear of the phrase "Great Men", preferring the more neutral formulation "transformative individuals". He takes as his subjects 12 national leaders of

"This is an examination of how far individuals can alter the course of history – and how far we are all merely the playthings of forces beyond our control"

the 20th century, all of whom can be said to have had a significant impact on the times in which they lived – for good or ill.

His subjects range surprisingly widely. Some, such as Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler, had a decidedly baleful influence. The contributions of others – Winston Churchill, Konrad Adenauer, Mikhail Gorbachev – can be judged rather more positively. In addition, he looks at some figures of more national significance: Margaret Thatcher, Charles de Gaulle, Tito, Franco and Helmut Kohl.

For each individual, Kershaw starts by examining their personality, so far as is possible. (Of course, those he presents were often of a type: driven, ruthless and egocentric. Timid, self-effacing wallflowers do not generally change the world.) He then explains the historical environment in which each subject operated, deciphering the sometimes complex interconnection and interplay between the individual and their circumstances, before concluding with an assessment of their influence and legacy.

Many examples are familiar. Without the searing social, political and economic impacts of the First World War on Germany, for instance, it is hard to see Hitler rising beyond Bavarian obscurity. Nonetheless, it was Hitler's obsessive and paranoid anti-Semitism that was the primary driver behind the Nazi genocide of the Jews. Similarly, Lenin's personal influence on the direction of the October Revolution in Russia is incontrovertible. But one must also recognise the very limited influence Lenin had over the progress of events leading up to the fall of the Romanov dynasty. Prior to his arrival in Russia in 1917, very few Russians would even have known who he was.

In some instances, the individual's influence on events is more clearly evident. Stalin's hand on the Soviet tiller was very decisive in executing the "Great Turn" towards collectivisation after 1928, for instance. That of Mikhail Gorbachev was also decisive – though with less obvious intent – in steering the Soviet Union to its collapse in 1991.

Helpfully, Kershaw provides a thoughtful analytical framework within which to assess his subjects' influence. Among other things, he asks whether the individual's impact was amplified by political upheaval or ideological inflexibility, or whether their efforts were hindered by the constraints of warfare or by democratic and state structures.

That methodological gloss is worn quite lightly, however, and does not impose itself too much on the whole. *Personality and Power* is, at its heart, an engaging and well-written set of interpretative essays on the careers of some of Europe's most significant leaders of the last century. It is bound to appeal to all those interested in the continent's recent history, whatever their positions on the roles of these individuals in influencing events.

Kershaw's conclusions are thoroughly sensible. He recognises the role of both historical circumstances and of these individuals, whose influence on events is incontrovertible. He is a clear-eyed and sure-footed guide, utilising his unrivalled expertise in modern European history to explore these interplays and interconnections.

Above all, with its focus on the interplay between personal and impersonal drivers, this book is a wonderful reminder of the sheer dynamism of history, and of its fundamentally fluid nature. It shows us that, away from outdated assumptions and dogmatic ideological positions, individual brilliance or systemic upheaval alone are often not enough to influence events. It is the interaction between the two – often unwitting and chaotic – that makes the difference.

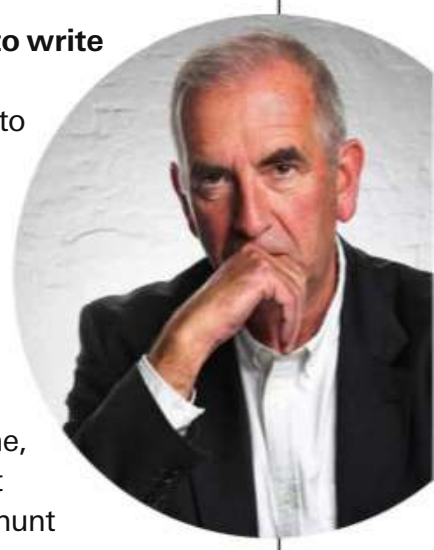
Aside from its illuminating core thesis, this book also reminds the reader of the idea of turning points and of the influence of chance – one of the "impersonal forces" that so often evades scrutiny. Lenin's revolutionary ambitions would have been for nought were it not for the German offer of a sealed train to transport him back to Russia. Similarly, had it not been for France's catastrophic defeat by Germany in 1940, few of us would ever have heard of Charles de Gaulle.

Interestingly, the author inadvertently demonstrates the unpredictability of the past in his conclusion, where he makes a passing reference to the "calm assuredness and pragmatism" that characterised the rule of Angela Merkel. It is perhaps indicative of how quickly history can sometimes shift – with or without "transformative leaders" – that, after the events of recent months in eastern Europe, few would now garland the former German chancellor with such unalloyed praise. H

Roger Moorhouse is a historian and author. His latest book is *First to Fight: The Polish War 1939* (Vintage, 2019)

Royal revenge

Robert Harris discusses the hunt for the killers of Charles I that inspired *Act of Oblivion*



What prompted you to write about the regicides?
I saw a tweet referring to the greatest manhunt of the 17th century. The conjunction of "manhunt" and "17th century" intrigued me. And the more I read about it, the more intrigued I became, because it seemed that this extraordinary manhunt lacked a man *hunter*. Someone must have drawn up the list of regicides and interrogated people, but that person didn't exist in the sources. So I began to create this character, Richard Nayler, who would be my hunter.

Other than creating that character, how close to the historical record did you stay with *Act of Oblivion*?
Very close indeed. I followed two regicides, Colonel Edward Whalley and his son-in-law, Colonel William Goffe, who fled together to New England. And wherever the historical record shows that they went, I sent them there. Whoever they hid with, I had them hide with. I followed all the known facts.

Of course, there are huge gaps in the historical record where no one knows what they were doing – for instance, nobody knows what ultimately happened to Goffe. And it was into those spaces that I was able to insert invention.

Did you uncover any new historical information during your research?
First, nobody seemed to agree on how old William Goffe was, but I discovered his baptismal record and found out that he was born in Wales. So that is new.

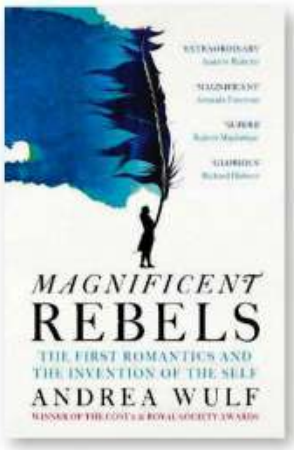
And I believe I have cleared up the mystery of Whalley's wife's family. She was called Catherine Middleton, bizarrely enough. I found that she was descended from a good Puritan family, and that her grandfather had been lord mayor of London. So in terms of those two finds, I think I've pushed the boundary.

Act of Oblivion
by Robert Harris
Hutchinson Heinemann, 464 pages, £22

ROMANTICISM

Self consciousness

DAISY HAY is inspired by a study of a ground-breaking group of philosophers and writers – and the woman who lived a life that their theories merely postulated



Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self
by Andrea Wulf
John Murray, 512 pages, £25

In the final years of the 18th century, the German town of Jena became, for a brief period, the meeting place for a group of men and women whose ideas about the self would shape the modern world. Jena's governance was shared among four different duchies, with the result that rules determining what could and couldn't be taught at its university were rarely enforced. "There was," writes Andrea Wulf in *Magnificent Rebels*, "no university like it in Europe."

In the two decades following 1790, Jena became the home of a group that included the philosophers Johann Fichte, Georg Hegel and Friedrich Schelling, the writers August and Friedrich Schlegel, and the playwright Friedrich Schiller. The writers Goethe and Novalis lived nearby and visited regularly, as did the explorer Alexander von Humboldt. Linking them was the extraordinary figure of Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling (1763–1809). Widowed in 1788, she married August Schlegel in 1796, then Friedrich Schelling in 1803.

Caroline's story sits at the heart of *Magnificent Rebels*. Partly that's because of the central role she played in yoking the philosophers of Jena into a community, but also because she personified many of that community's ideals. In 1793 she was imprisoned, along with her daughter Auguste, in Königstein Fortress by Prussian forces who suspected her of links with French revolutionary forces. Newly pregnant by a French soldier, she sent frantic letters from her cell to old friends with connections at the Prussian court, pleading for help before her pregnancy was discovered. Having been freed, and following the early death of the baby born shortly after her release, Caroline married August Schlegel and set about rebuilding her life with August in Jena.

Wulf clearly sees in Caroline a model for how to be in the world: adventurous, unafraid and thirsty for new ideas. *Magnificent Rebels* is all of these things, and Wulf is herself a brilliant guide who takes complicated ideas and renders them for the reader with clarity and generosity. Her story reveals how the men built on the ideas of Immanuel Kant to develop theories of the self and free will. Fichte posited subjectivity and the "pure-I" as the centre of scientific, religious, ethical and legal systems. And in the poetic dreamscapes imagined by Novalis, the mind transcends the body to build the world on its own terms, in defiance of the mechanisation of the modern world.

The ideals woman Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling in a 1798 portrait. The philosophy by which she lived her life both informed and was informed by the ideals and theories of the Romantic writers of her milieu

> **"Wulf's book is a testament to the powers of the mind, of friendship, of free will, and the possibility of snatching delight from the jaws of despair"**

Caroline, meanwhile, put their ideas into practice, and claimed her right to embrace the things that made life worth living. "In spite of God and man I want to be happy," she declared, and "I can live without love, but taking friendship away from me takes away everything that makes me love life." That is an apposite declaration for a book concerned not simply with the ideas of its protagonists but with the way in which the company of others made those ideas thrive and grow.

Wulf's book is a magnificent achievement. It is a testament to the powers of the mind, certainly, but also to the power of friendship, free will and the possibility of snatching delight from the jaws of despair. "The Jena set gave wings to our minds," Wulf writes in conclusion. "How we use them is up to us." H

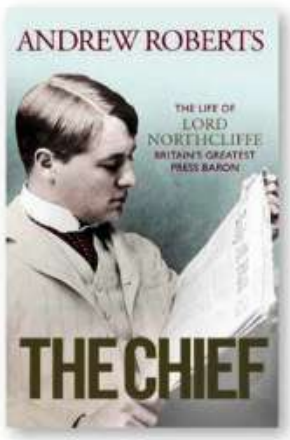
Daisy Hay is associate professor in English literature and life writing at the University of Exeter. Her books include *Dinner with Joseph Johnson: Books and Friendship in a Revolutionary Age* (Chatto & Windus, 2022)

ALAMY

MEDIA

Paper tiger

STEPHEN BATES devours a lively, well-researched biography of a controversial and influential news tycoon



The Chief: The Life of Lord Northcliffe
by Andrew Roberts
Simon & Schuster, 560 pages, £25

Any British newspaper you pick up today – local or national, tabloid or broadsheet – has been influenced by a man who died 100 years ago. Alfred Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe, founded the *Daily Mirror* and his greatest creation, the *Daily Mail*. He later owned *The Times*, *The Observer* and the *Evening News* as well – 40 per cent of the newspaper market, at a time when papers were the only sources of news.

Northcliffe has been written about often, but Andrew Roberts' latest biography is surely definitive. With access to the Harmsworth family's papers, he has produced a detailed and convincing portrait of the great man who signed memos to staff as "the Chief". If Roberts' tone occasionally veers towards the hagiographic – he writes regularly for Conservative outlets including the *Daily Mail* – it does not blind him to his subject's faults.

Harmsworth stamped his personality and style on his papers, particularly the *Mail*. He demanded shorter stories and livelier writing, more vivid pages and a wider range of coverage. His editors were ordered to "touch life at as many points as possible". What sold, he told them, were "health things, sex things and money things", appealing to women as well as men. Human interest and readability were priorities all papers came to adopt.

Within five years of its launch in 1896, the *Mail* claimed the biggest circulation in the world. Eight years earlier, Harmsworth had been an impecunious freelance selling stories for a guinea a go. Now he was a millionaire. By the time he was 40, he had a peerage.

Northcliffe didn't mind who he offended. "The *Daily Mail* is the best-hated paper in the world," he told one of his journalists. "On the day it ceases to be, I'll change my staff." His papers played a major part in the deposition of the ineffectual Liberal prime minister Herbert Asquith in 1916. He fell out with that leader's successor, David Lloyd George, and made even Winston Churchill tread warily.

Early *Mail* campaigns covered pasteurised milk, bread, telephones in police stations – even a new men's hat. During the First World War, its revelations about the shortage of shells for British guns on the western front – a result of the government's complacent procurement practices – caused a crisis. The Chief was, though, also prone to hypocrisy, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, imperialism, bullying, conspiratorialism and an ostentatious populism. Some of these were merely prejudices of their time; others, some may feel, still resonate in his old paper today.

The *Mail* was then, as it often is today, widely sneered at – it was "written by office boys for office boys", said Lord Salisbury. Northcliffe didn't mind that, either, so long as they bought it. What enabled him to transform newspapers was the expansion of literacy following the 1870 Education Act, along with his willingness to invest in the latest print and telecommunications technology. He paid his journalists well, and expected them to dress respectably, to get the news first, and always to get the most interesting angle. The *Mail* still prioritises these things.

The book's major revelation is the cause of Northcliffe's death at the age of 57, gibbering and waving a revolver at his staff. Some have suggested syphilis as the cause, but his doctors at the time diagnosed an even more frightening condition: septic endocarditis – blood poisoning, causing delirium, fever and death. He was given a funeral in Westminster Abbey and, as the *Manchester Guardian* observed in its obituary: "There has been nothing in journalism to compare with him." H

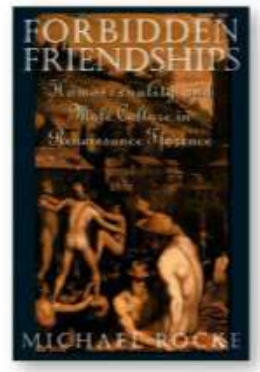
GETTY IMAGES

> **"Early *Daily Mail* campaigns covered pasteurised milk, bread, telephones in police stations – even a new men's hat"**

Stephen Bates is a writer and journalist who has worked for the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*. His latest book is *The Poisonous Solicitor* (Icon, 2022)

THE CLASSIC BOOK

Catherine Fletcher on a book exploring **Renaissance attitudes to sex**



Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence
by Michael Rocke
(OUP, 1996)

Michael Rocke's *Forbidden Friendships* is a rare history book that transforms your understanding both of the society it portrays and of the world more widely.

Writing in the 1990s, and taking a significant career risk to do so, Rocke set out to study sex between men in Renaissance Florence, using the records of the city's Office of the Night. Between 1432 and 1502, this magistracy policed homosexual behaviour. Its records led Rocke to an astonishing conclusion: in the later 15th century, "the majority of local males at least once during their lifetimes were officially incriminated for engaging in homosexual relations".

Read that again: most men in Florence were at least trying out bisexuality. This was a place where same-sex relations were a norm for young men, at least within certain parameters. Socially acceptable relationships required an age disparity, with the older man in the active sexual role; the younger partner was often still a teenager. Relationships between two mature men were not condoned.

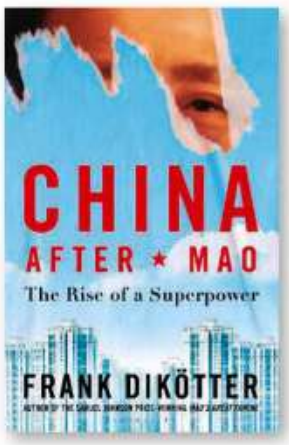
Unlike today, when people are often divided into homosexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals, with the widespread assumption that those categories are innate, Renaissance Florentines saw sexuality differently. True, they might observe that some people were more inclined to same-sex relations than others, but they didn't put a label on that. Instead, they talked about sodomy as a type of behaviour. This book not only tells us about history but challenges the way we think today. H

Catherine Fletcher is the author of *The Beauty and the Terror: An Alternative History of the Italian Renaissance* (Bodley Head, 2020)

CHINA

Chaos theory

ROBERT BICKERS finds troubling but insightful reading in a new political history of China, from the economic travails of the 1970s to the dominance of today's Asian powerhouse



China After Mao: The Rise of a Superpower
by Frank Dikötter
Bloomsbury, 416 pages, £25

When I arrived in China for the first time in summer 1985, I was astonished at what I found. "People people people dust dust dust," I wrote in a letter home. Compared with Taiwan – a foodie paradise – there seemed to be nowhere to eat; worse, often there seemed to be *nothing* to eat. I had gone from one China, which worked, to another, which did not.

The new book by Frank Dikötter, who also first arrived in 1985, is a sequel to his three previous volumes chronicling the history of the People's Republic of China since its establishment in 1949. In it, he outlines the trajectory of China's politics after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. And he explores the "demented" economy – as described by a British diplomat then – that we both encountered in 1985, now widely assumed to have been consigned to history.

The conventional narrative runs thus. Once a sequence of post-Mao political manoeuvres had played out, the aged but pragmatic Communist Party veteran Deng Xiaoping assumed a paramount position that he retained until his death in 1997. As long as the cat catches mice, Deng would say, it does not matter if it is black or white: if capitalist practices help reconstruct China's socialist economy and society, then so be it. Deng unleashed a set of reforms that transformed a country devastated by the ultra-leftist policies of the Mao era, and opened China up to foreign trade and investment. These "reform and opening up" policies were continued by his successors, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. Despite the occasional glitch, China's rulers steadily worked towards rationalising and modernising the state.

Dikötter does not accept this narrative. In his telling, there was ultimately very little rationality in what unfolded, because a truly rational set of policies would have led to the dismantling of the position and power of the

Misplaced optimism Pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, April 1989. They would soon be subjected to a brutal crackdown by the People's Liberation Army

> **"The brutal suppression of earlier protests has not been repeated – not because it could not be, but because the party-state mostly uses other tools of repression"**

Chinese Communist Party. In 2022, the Party seems never to have been stronger and – with the new technologies available to it – never more pervasive in the everyday lives of China's 1.4 billion inhabitants. When "glitches" did occur – popular protests such as the 1989 demonstrations across the country – they were brutally suppressed. In Beijing that year, tanks and automatic weapons were used by the People's Liberation Army to murder thousands of Chinese citizens. That has not been repeated – not because it could not be but, rather, because the party-state has mostly used other tools of repression.

Despite Dikötter's commitment to presenting a "people's history" in much of his work, a consistent and textured account of what this all meant for China's citizens is largely absent here. *China After Mao* instead provides an account of the twists and turns of China's politics – particularly its economic policies – and their impact from the mid-1970s to 2012, with an epilogue that sketches the main developments of the past decade. It is a complex story, and the focus on economic policy and its impact does not always make easy reading. But the conclusions are clear, if bleak. In China today there is more than enough to eat – but the economy remains demented, and the Party retains control. H

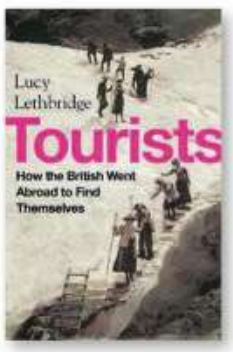
Robert Bickers is professor of history at the University of Bristol, and author of *Out of China: How the Chinese Ended the Era of Western Domination* (Allen Lane, 2017)

BRIDGEMAN

New horizons British tourists promenade in the Tuileries Garden, Paris in a 19th-century illustration. The growth of overseas travel from Britain after the Napoleonic Wars is the focus of Lucy Lethbridge's new book

SOCIAL

Brits on tour



Tourists: How the British Went Abroad to Find Themselves
by Lucy Lethbridge
Bloomsbury, 320 pages, £20

For over 10 years, the Napoleonic Wars prevented Brits from travelling abroad – an imposed isolation that resonates with our own recent experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lucy Lethbridge's new book, *Tourists*, begins in 1815 – the year when Europe opened up again after Napoleon's defeat – and charts the steady rise of tourism over the two centuries that followed. More a whirlwind sightseeing trip than a leisurely Grand Tour, this jam-packed volume introduces us to a dizzying cast of memorable characters who all played a role in creating the concept of modern tourism. Her dramatis personae range from the indefatigable Thomas Cook, who democratised foreign travel, to the "celebrated hydropathy guru" Victor Preissnitz, whose eccentric rituals helped to popularise the idea of health tourism.

Drawing on an impressive range of travel guides and diaries, Lethbridge shares amusing anecdotes and memorable facts that bring to life the motivations, opinions and, frequently, prejudices of British travellers.

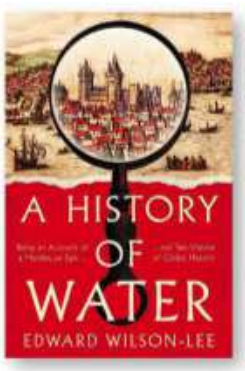
We meet young Mary Browne, who kept a diary of her visit to France in the 1820s, documenting her disgust at just about everything French. "The cows were too thin, the pigs too long-legged, the babies over-swaddled," she wrote, "the ladies wore clashing colours, the Seine was filthy." As for French people, they always "seemed to be creeping along and looking like oysters". The more-intrepid Emily Lowe roamed Norway alone in 1857, declaring that: "The only use of a gentleman in travelling is to look after the luggage."

Discussing how steam power, photography and mass-produced souvenirs altered our perceptions of travel in the modern age, Lethbridge thoughtfully probes questions of authenticity and considers the damaging effect that mass tourism can have on traditions and communities. From the wealthy Grand Tourists and Baedeker-wielding travellers of the 19th century to the caravan enthusiasts and frequent fliers of the 20th, she also shows that diverse groups of travellers had far more in common than we might expect. H

Anna Maria Barry, historian, writer, researcher and curator

EUROPEAN

Going with the flow



A History of Water
by Edward Wilson-Lee
William Collins, 352 pages, £25

This is a wonderfully entertaining and intelligent account of two loosely connected lives that, like streams, meander until they converge to form something larger. Both were 16th-century Portuguese men, and both died in obscurity, though one acquired international fame soon after his death.

Damião de Góis was a scholar, traveller, translator, royal archivist and author of a history of the reign of Portuguese king Manuel I. His later years were plagued by accusations of heresy, and the Inquisition sentenced him to perpetual confinement in a monastery. In 1574 he died in a fire, clutching a half-burned piece of paper; he had apparently been released from confinement, though one report suggests he was strangled before the fire. Luis de Camões, meanwhile, was a hapless sailor and adventurer, Portugal's national poet and author of epic poem *The Lusiads*.

Wilson-Lee traces the travels of Góis in northern Europe, from the Netherlands through Poland to Muscovy, and of Camões across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and along the shores of Africa and India. Their experiences furnish opportunities for a rich diet of incidental details about 16th-century religions, societies, dinner tables, conversations and art. This is a colourful depiction of encounters between cultures in an era of international travel, trade and conflict.

Why a history of water? Because Camões' experiences were very much at sea, and because his epic celebrates the Portuguese voyages of discovery – specifically Vasco da Gama's expeditions – which he imagined as heroic encounters with the unknown (though his own experiences along the same route showed how well-travelled these trade routes were by non-European cultures). And because Góis' experiences were metaphorically liquid – a flow of encounters between different peoples, and of conversations that led to wonder and understanding of otherness.

Góis was suppressed by the Inquisition and more or less forgotten, whereas Camões's imperial, colonialist epic achieved posthumous fame. These are two visions of European experiences in the 16th century, two kinds of history, made of similar materials and worlds apart. Wilson-Lee follows the two men around the globe, showing how one vision of European experiences of travel and encounters dominated while the other was forgotten. H

Joad Raymond, historian and author

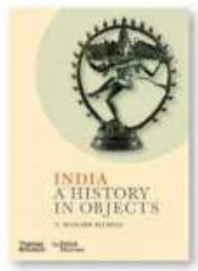
WORDS BY **REBECCA FRANKS**, **RHIANNON DAVIES** & **MATT ELTON**

ELF

ALSO ON THE BOOKSHELF

ASIA

India: A History in Objects
by T Richard Blurton
(Thames & Hudson, 320 pages, £30)

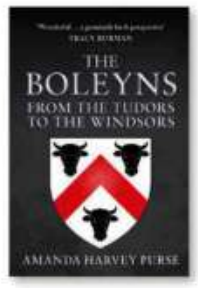


Cultural currents

Spanning more than a million years and an area that now comprises India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, this elegant visual history tells the region's story via a diverse array of artefacts. From ancient wall paintings and early representations of divine figures to the artistic developments wrought by waves of religious and political upheaval, it's a fascinating overview of centuries of cultural change.

BIOGRAPHY

The Boleyns: From the Tudors to the Windsors
by Amanda Harvey Purse
(Amberley, 288 pages, £22.99)



The other Boleyns

What happened to the Boleyn family after Anne and her brother George were executed in 1536? That's the question at the heart of this book, which traces the stories of members of their family up to the present. There's Mary, banished by Anne and Henry VIII for marrying a man deemed unworthy; Lettice Knollys, who became entangled in a love triangle in Elizabeth I's court; and many others besides.

CULTURE

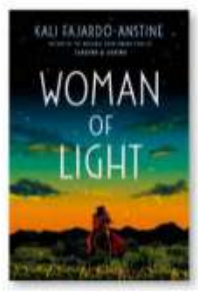
Love and Let Die: Bond, the Beatles and the British Psyche
by John Higgs
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 528 pages, £22)

Lucy in the sky with diamonds are forever

Friday, 5 October 1962 saw the release of both a single and a film that would prove to be the first instalments in two enduring British cultural institutions: The Beatles' 'Love Me Do' and *Dr No*, featuring super-spy James Bond. This lively history explores the birth and continued success of these juggernauts, and what their perspectives – on gender, on class and on power – tell us about the ways the nation sees itself.

FICTION

Woman of Light
by Kali Fajardo-Anstine
(Little, Brown, 336 pages, £16.99)



Visionary tales

In her bewitching debut novel, Kali Fajardo-Anstine tells the story of five generations of the Lopez family in the American west. Luz "Little Light" Lopez, an orphaned tea-leaf reader and laundress in 1930s Denver, begins to have visions that take her back to her Indigenous homeland in the Lost Territory. Separated from her brother, Diego, Luz finds herself the only person able to save her ancestors' stories.

GEOGRAPHY

Himalaya: Exploring the Roof of the World
by John Keay
(Bloomsbury Circus, 432 pages, £30)

Range rover

Mount Everest might be the most famous of the world's mountains, but the region in which it stands is no less remarkable. As well as having some of the tallest mountains in the world, the Himalayas is home to thousands of glaciers, as well as desert and rainforest. It is a place of extremes that has attracted visitors ranging from missionaries to mountaineers, as John Keay reveals in this richly researched book.

BIOGRAPHY

Pretty Young Rebel: The Life of Flora Macdonald
by Flora Fraser
(Bloomsbury, 320 pages, £25)

Charlie's angel

Writing about her namesake Flora Macdonald, Flora Fraser's latest book is sure to appeal to those with an interest in Bonnie Prince Charlie. It celebrates the life of the Highlander who helped Charles disguise himself as a woman and flee Scotland after his defeat at Culloden. This episode is covered in detail, but we also learn about Macdonald's wider life, including her emigration to North America.

CULTURAL

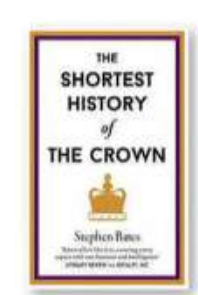
All the Knowledge in the World: The Extraordinary History of the Encyclopaedia
by Simon Garfield
(W&N, 352 pages, £18.99)

Encyclopaedic knowledge

In 2021, Simon Garfield snapped up his first *Encyclopaedia Britannica* bargain: seven volumes from 1815–24, for the sum of just £50. He then found further editions wherever he looked, including a 35-book set selling for just 1p. Why do we value high-quality information so little now, he wondered? The question sparked his quest to understand the history of the encyclopaedia, from ancient Greece to Wikipedia.

MONARCHY

The Shortest History of the Crown
by Stephen Bates
(Old Street Publishing, 288 pages, £12.99)



Crowning glory

Britain's is the most famous of the world's surviving monarchies, with its royal history stretching back for more than 1,000 years. Britain's monarchy is still incredibly popular, too: a 2020 poll found it overwhelmingly supported by its population. From Alfred the Great to Elizabeth II, Stephen Bates offers a lively, concise guide to the crown, charting its colourful highs and troubled lows. H

ENCOUNTERS

WATCH

A battle for survival

Europeans who encountered the Agojie – fearsome female warriors who protected Dahomey, a kingdom that flourished in what's now Benin c1600–1904 – dubbed them "Amazons". Their story, which provided inspiration for the all-female fighting group Dora Milaje in the superhero film *Black Panther*, is both remarkable and – considering how few women have served as front-line troops down the years – highly unusual.

It's accordingly worth celebrating, which is precisely what big-budget epic *The Woman King* does. Set in the 19th century, it stars Academy Award-winner Viola Davis as General Nanisca, who's charged with training a new generation of recruits – fighters who will face an enemy intent on destroying Dahomey's way of life.

Keen to ensure authenticity, director Gina Prince-Bythewood had her cast preparing for nine months. According to Davis, this involved "weight training, sprinting, martial arts and weaponry training for the machete". Davis is joined on screen by Thuso Mbedu, Sheila Atim (both of whom starred in *The Underground Railroad*) and Lashana Lynch (*Captain Marvel*). John Boyega of *Star Wars* fame plays Dahomey's monarch, Ghezo.

The Woman King
In cinemas from Tuesday 4 October

Viola Davis stars as General Nanisca, tasked with training new recruits for Dahomey's elite Agojie fighting force

TRISTAR PRODUCTIONS

VISIT

New perspectives

How should British universities grapple with the legacies of empire? As part of efforts to tackle that question, an exhibition at the University of St Andrews' Wardlaw Museum draws together items from the university's collections that are connected with colonialism, to view them from a fresh perspective.

One example of this approach is the fish *Tenualosa ilisha*. Previously treated merely as a scientific specimen, it's culturally significant in parts of the Indian subcontinent, where it's eaten on special dates. For the exhibition, Dr Anindya Raychaudhuri, a senior lecturer in English, shares information on the fish's formerly neglected cultural importance.

Re-collecting Empire
Wardlaw Museum, University of St Andrews / Until 22 October / Free entry / *st-andrews.ac.uk*

This 12th-century fresco shows a member of the Knights Templar. *In Our Time* explores the order's history

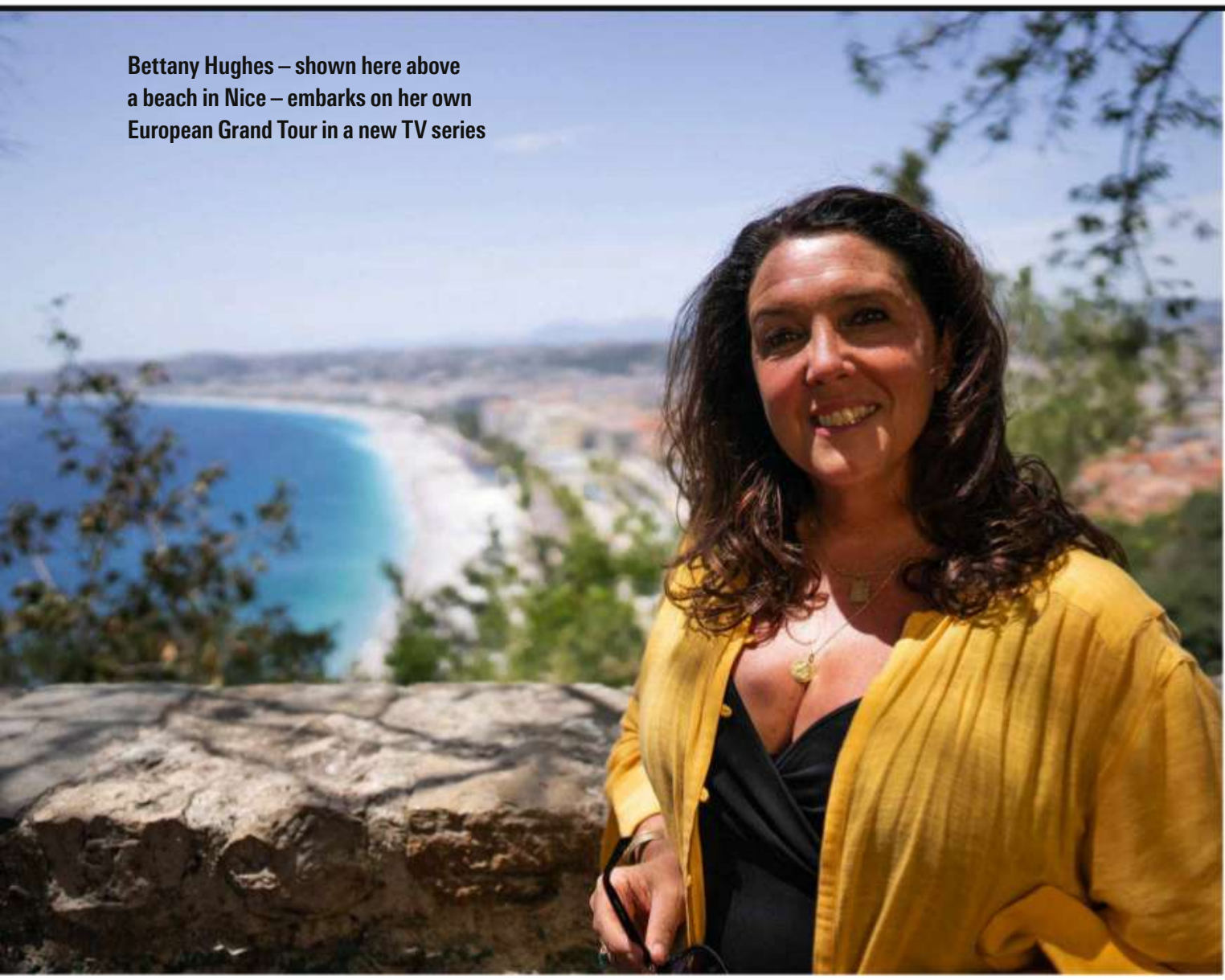
LISTEN

Learned chat

With *In Our Time*, presenter Melvyn Bragg admirably performs a high-wire act. Alert to the need to move things along when academic panellists threaten to go even slightly off-topic, he's never *too* brusque. As a result, the show – which ranges across the history of ideas – is regularly one of the highlights of the week on Radio 4.

October's programmes kick off with an episode devoted to the Knights Templar, the Catholic military order associated with the crusades and disbanded by Pope Clement V in 1312. Experts speaking on this show are historians Mike Carr, Helen Nicholson and Jonathan Phillips.

In Our Time
BBC Radio 4 and Sounds / Thursday 6 October



Bettany Hughes – shown here above a beach in Nice – embarks on her own European Grand Tour in a new TV series

WATCH

Time travel

The Grand Tour – the trend of aristocratic young Britons travelling around Europe to see the continent's cultural highlights – essentially ended in the 19th century. But might the practice be worth revising? Could our lives be enriched by spending more time travelling and looking at art? These are questions tackled by Bettany Hughes in a new series in which she heads for France and Italy.

One of her destinations, Vence on the French Riviera, has a personal resonance for Hughes. It was here that her great-aunt – the magnificently monikered Martha Gordon Crotch – ran the bohemian Peasant Shop, specialising in pottery. Crotch, we learn, exhibited a series of nudes painted by DH Lawrence – pictures that were banned in the UK.

La Dolce Vita
Channel 5 & My5 / Begins late September

CHANNEL 5/BRIDGEMAN/SKY HISTORY

Kit Harington explores his grandfathers' experiences of the Second World War, from a connection with Ian Fleming to a brutal case of shell-shock

CHANNEL 4/GETTY IMAGES

WATCH

Histories of violence

The conflicts of the 20th century continue to play out in the present. That's one of the inescapable lessons of *My Grandparents' War*, which follows celebrities as they explore the experiences of their forebears, often reaching a new understanding of their family dynamics.

The producers clearly have an excellent contacts book: the second series features A-lister Keira Knightley; singer-songwriter Emeli Sandé; Toby Jones, an actor approaching national-treasure status following turns in *Detectorists* and Hollywood blockbusters; and Kit Harington, star of *Game of Thrones*.

The episode featuring Harington – available to stream via All4, along with episodes from series one featuring the likes of Mark Rylance and Helena Bonham Carter – is packed with thought-provoking details. Harington discovers that his paternal grandfather, John Harington, served in Naval Intelligence alongside James Bond creator Ian Fleming during the Second World War. His grandfather on the other side of his family, Mick Catesby, fought in Italy. Dozens of his comrades didn't survive that brutal campaign, and the shell-shocked Catesby never spoke of what he saw.

My Grandparents' War
Channel 4 & All4 / Airing Thursdays until 6 October

Weekly TV & radio
Visit *historyextra.com* for updates on upcoming TV and radio programmes

HISTORY ON THE BOX

"Una has been neglected here and in Jamaica. It's good that this programme is resurrecting her"

Theatre director **ANTON PHILLIPS** (left) tells us about a new documentary celebrating the BBC's first black producer, Una Marson

You're a consultant on the new programme about Una Marson (1905–65), the Jamaican activist and writer who worked for the BBC. How did you meet her?
It was when she was writing a short story about someone who had come to the US – a youth who was unhappy and wanted to return to Jamaica. As it happened, I had only recently come to the US as a teenager [Phillips' mother, part of the same intellectual and literary set to which Marson belonged, was a diplomat in Washington DC], and I was very unhappy.

So off we went round to her house, where we had a chat – although I don't think she got quite as much material as she had hoped. I rather held back, in part because I felt my reasons for wanting to go back [to Jamaica] might seem to be a little trivial. I remember her as a formidable woman who didn't seem to suffer fools easily!

How did you come to be involved in the new documentary?
The producers knew that I had this connection with her, and they wanted to have a flavour of the time. I also have my mother's photographs of Una, from a time when people used to exchange studio portraits.

Do you think that Marson has become a rather overlooked figure?
Yes – and, because she was someone I knew, it never occurred to me that she hadn't been celebrated until I contributed to this programme. *Caribbean Voices* was a highlight of the week. [It was a BBC World Service series that ran from 1943 to 1958, which Marson created as a producer and which was especially important in providing a forum for Caribbean literature.] I can remember as a boy sitting down by the radio and listening to it.

Can you tell us more about her work for the BBC?
For a woman at that time to be as influential as she was, and to come to Britain in the 1930s and make the breakthroughs that she did, was a pretty remarkable thing to have happened. Her radio programme [*Caribbean Voices*] involved interviewing Caribbean intellectuals. To be in that position, you really needed to know your stuff as a journalist. George Orwell was a friend and mentor to her.

It is a shame that this formidable, intellectual Caribbean woman has been neglected – not only here but also in Jamaica as well. It's good that this programme is going to resurrect her, so that we can go back and examine whether her work has stood the test of time. H

Una Marson: Our Lost Caribbean Voice will be broadcast on BBC Two on Sunday 23 October

BBC TWO

Una Marson broadcasts to the West Indies, 1942. Her work with the BBC is explored in a new show

TASTE

Mersu

The earliest form of this dish was made in ancient Mesopotamia. Incredibly, we have written versions of recipes for mersu in several "cooking tablets" dating from c1750 BC and now held in the Yale Babylonian Collection, a staggering repository of Mesopotamian literature.

These tablets weren't like the cookery books we use today. Most Mesopotamians couldn't read; rather than providing instructions for home bakers at the time, the tablets were created so that future learned elites could read them and learn about Mesopotamian culture.

Mersu uses only two ingredients: dates and pistachio nuts. Both were part of ancient Middle Eastern diets for centuries. Date palms in particular were highly revered in Mesopotamian society.

Although mersu may seem simple, it was greatly prized in ancient times. There were even professional chefs whose sole job was to create these nutty balls.

Difficulty: 1/10
Time: 20 mins

INGREDIENTS

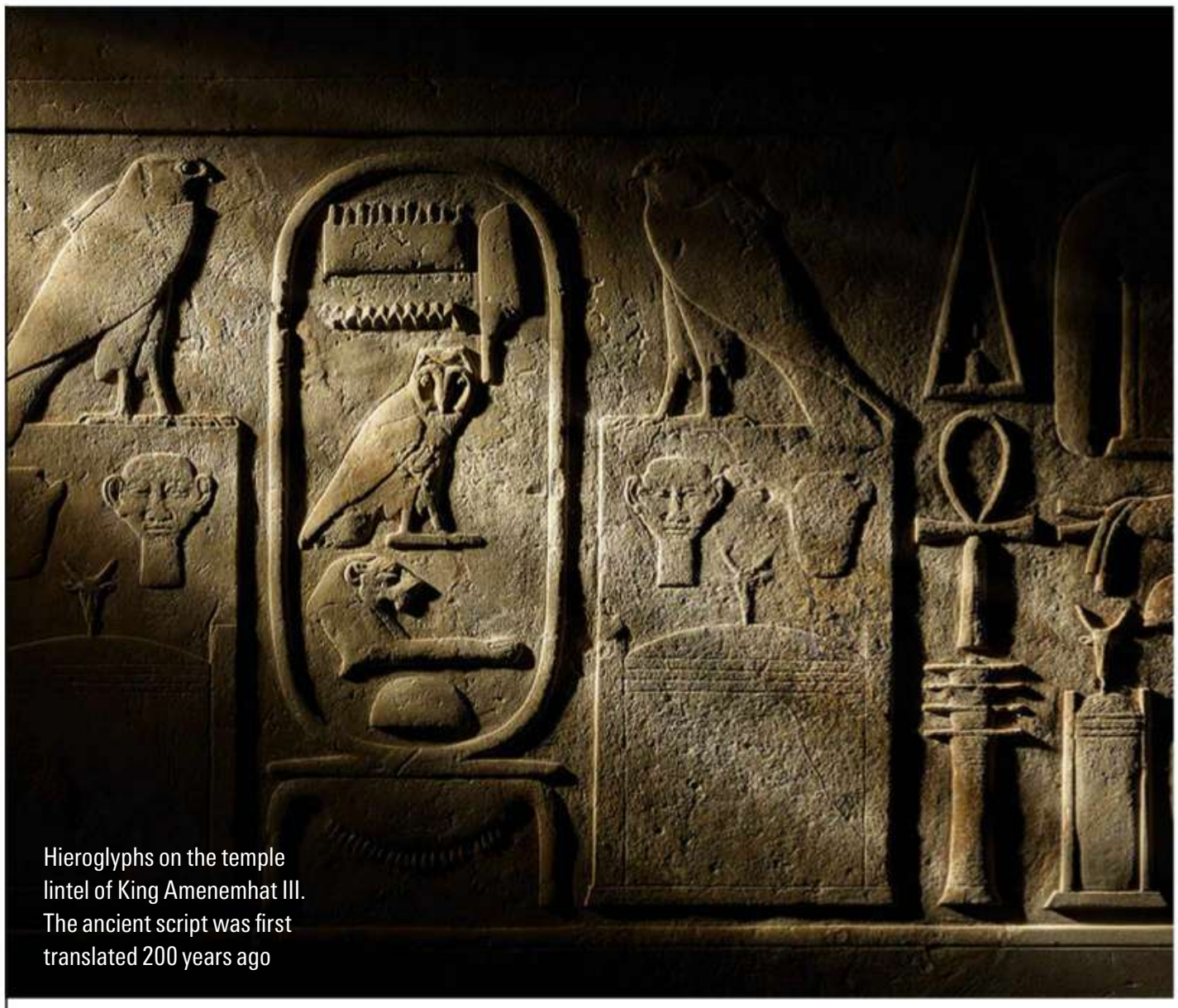
2 cups of dates, pitted
2 cups of pistachio nuts, shelled

METHOD

1. Mash the dates into a smooth paste. You can use a mortar and pestle or a food processor, or chop them finely with a knife.
2. Grind or pound the pistachio nuts.
3. Combine half of the ground pistachio nuts with the date paste and mix well. With damp hands, roll the mixture into small, uniform balls (moisture will make the mixture easier to handle).
4. Spread out the remaining ground pistachios on a dish or piece of waxed paper.
5. Roll each mersu ball in the ground nuts, patting gently all around to ensure the nuts stick.

Recipe: Pass The Flamingo. passtheflamingo.com

This nutty, date-rich dessert was popular in ancient Mesopotamia



Hieroglyphs on the temple lintel of King Amenemhat III. The ancient script was first translated 200 years ago

VISIT

Read the room

Two hundred years ago, linguists made a historic breakthrough: they learned to decipher hieroglyphic – the ancient Egyptian writing system that for millennia nobody had been able to read. An explosion of knowledge about that civilisation followed, with the translation of texts ranging from political treaties to shopping lists.

The discovery is celebrated in a new British Museum exhibition. Highlighting the achievements of Jean-François Champollion and Thomas Young – who made the crucial advances – the display also showcases the earlier work of medieval Arabic scholars. And visitors can play the scholar by examining hieroglyphs they studied in order to crack the code.

Hieroglyphs: Unlocking Ancient Egypt
British Museum, London / 13 Oct–19 Feb 2023 / Booking required / *britishmuseum.org*

SHUTTERSTOCK/BRITISH MUSEUM

Transmission dates are correct at time of going to press but may have changed in the intervening period, so please check listings guides or broadcaster websites for more up-to-date information

After an eight-year restoration project, Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings has opened to visitors

SHREWSBURY FLAXMILL MALTINGS/CORNIUM MUSEUM/GETTY IMAGES

VISIT

Bastion of industry

Following an eight-year, £28m restoration project, in September Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings opened its doors to visitors. The site's historic buildings are now complemented by a new exhibition sharing the story of the mill, from its heyday during the industrial revolution to its role in the Second World War.

As well as appealing to history enthusiasts, the mill is also a big draw for visitors with an appreciation for architecture. And no wonder: the iron-framed Main Mill – which first opened in 1797 – is known as the "grandparent of skyscrapers".

Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings
Shrewsbury / Open now / Booking advised / *shrewsburyflaxmillmaltings.org.uk*

WATCH

Innovation motivation

With a net worth close to $250bn (at the time of writing), Elon Musk is the world's richest man. How did he become so successful? A three-part series from 72 Films, makers of *The Rise of the Murdoch Dynasty*, promises interviews with family members, friends and business associates as it traces his career from early tech start-ups to the present day.

A key draw is seeing how Musk's personal story intersects with wider history. In Canada in the late 1930s, Musk's grandfather, Joshua Haldeman, was a leader of Technocracy Incorporated – an organisation that promoted a radical restructuring of political, social and economic life in North America, but which eschewed politics in favour of science.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk is the grandson of a radical "technocrat"

The Elon Musk Show
BBC Two / October

The skeletons of six men – possibly gladiators, as depicted in this image – are on display at Cirencester's Corinium Museum

VISIT

Grave secrets

Driffield Terrace in York is a row of imposing Georgian houses – under which lay a secret undisturbed for centuries. Then, in 2004, archaeologists uncovered beneath its foundations a graveyard dating back to the Roman era. The burial site contained around 80 skeletons – many of which were missing their heads, or had evidence of other serious wounds.

Six of these skeletons are now on display at the Corinium Museum, part of a travelling Jorvik exhibition. Drawing on cutting-edge research, the exhibition explores the identities of these people, considering whether they were gladiators or criminals – and why they met such a gruesome fate.

Gladiators: A Cemetery of Secrets
Corinium Museum, Cirencester / 22 Oct–23 Apr 2023 / Booking advised / *coriniummuseum.org*

In a recent episode of our podcast, Angela Stienne explored whether mummies, such as this one at the British Museum, should be on display

Is it time to rethink how we display mummies?

Our podcast editor **ELLIE CAWTHORNE** delves into some recent debates around the procurement and display of Egyptian mummies by European museums

Every day, many thousands of us pour into museums across Europe to gawp at corpses. These mummies have been hauled from their resting places and placed into glass cases for our education (and, let's be honest, for our entertainment, too).

I hadn't really thought too deeply about this until I spoke to Dr Angela Stienne for our podcast. Her book *Mummified* (Manchester University Press, 2022) challenges our complacency about the presence of Egyptian mummies in European museums, and grapples with some thorny issues around their procurement and display.

First, and fundamentally: should we think of mummies merely as historical artefacts or as human remains? "Mummies have been commodified and objectified by the fact they've been acquired by museums but, first and foremost, they are bodies," says Stienne. "In fact, I like to see them as displaced people. Most people never question how they ended up in Europe, but it's due to acts of forced removal, looting and colonial violence."

So if we see mummies primarily as bodies – and displaced bodies, at that – where does that leave the museums holding them? As Stienne told me, there's been a lot of experimentation by museums who are attempting to display ancient human remains more ethically. Innovations include signage warning visitors that a room contains dead bodies, and providing context on how they were acquired. There have also been attempts to make displays more respectful – by darkening rooms, obscuring elements of a body, or asking visitors to be quiet. However, as Stienne points out, we can't be certain that these long-dead people would even have recognised these efforts as "respectful" at all.

And is adapting displays enough? "It's worth asking whether we really need to *see* these bodies in order to learn from them," says Stienne – a question that throws up even more potential predicaments. "If we remove mummies from display, we need to ensure that ethical practice continues in storage. I'm also in favour of repatriation when there are calls for it. But again, there are difficulties. There are an astounding number of Egyptian bodies in museums around the world, and to repatriate them all at one time would be completely overwhelming. The ideal situation would be for these bodies to not be in museums, but there are no easy answers to these difficult questions. Even so, I hope my research will provoke conversations around them."

"Mummies have been objectified by museums but, first and foremost, they are human bodies"

Listen now
You can hear this episode at
historyextra.com/egyptianmummies

THREE MORE PODCASTS ON **MUMMIES & MUSEUMS**

Body of the boy king

I think it's fair to say that there's only one standout contender for the most famous mummy in the world – Tutankhamun. As part of our series to mark 100 years since the discovery of the boy king's tomb, **Chris Naunton** joined me to investigate what the pharaoh's body can reveal about his short life, his premature death and Egyptian mummification techniques.
historyextra.com/pharaohsbody

Echoes of empire

How to display human remains isn't the only debate in which museums have been recently embroiled. The question of what should be done with bodies, which were often acquired by nefarious means, can be seen as part of a wider conversation about the colonial legacy of these institutions. **Alice Procter** explored this heated issue on the podcast back in 2020.
historyextra.com/colonialhistories

Museums as mirrors

"Museums everywhere are looking again at their history and collections, and thinking about them afresh." **Neil MacGregor**, former director of the British Museum, joined us earlier this year to discuss the changing role of museums, sharing insights into what our institutions can tell us about the current state of national identity.
historyextra.com/museums

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/SAMANTHA NOTT

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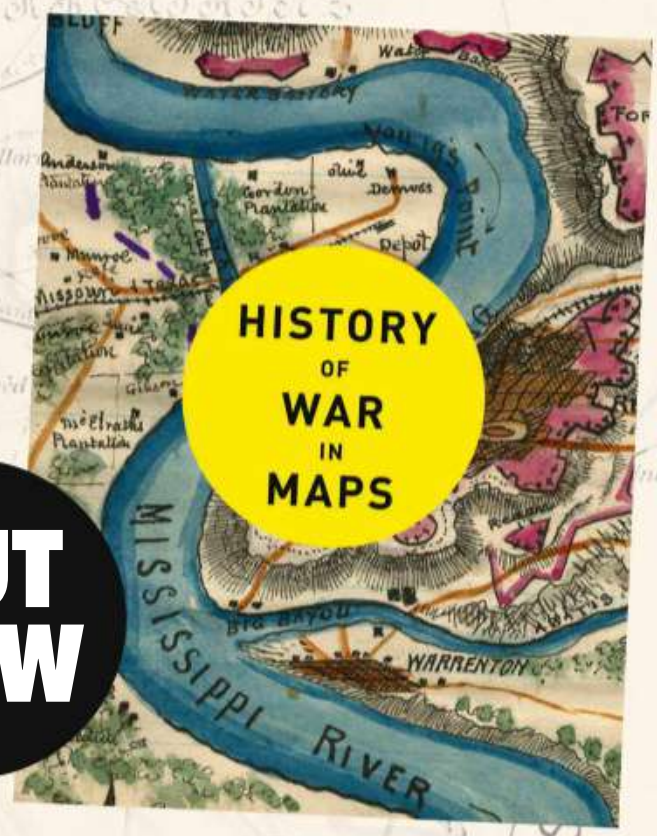

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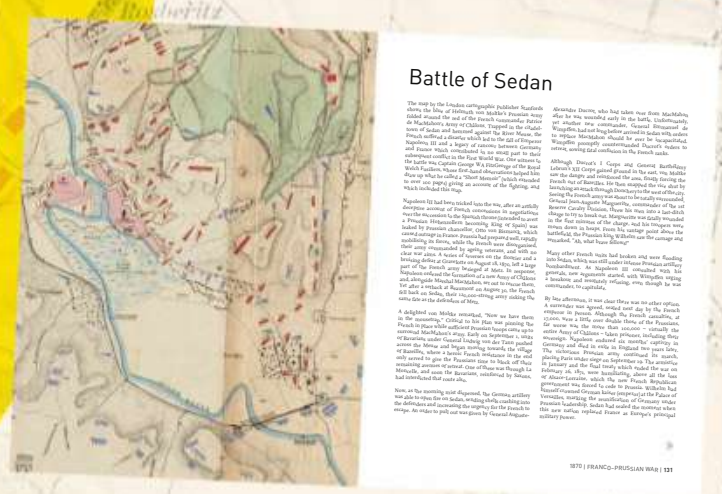


Beauty and battles

With its gorgeous riverside setting, this impressive 13th-century Cumbrian castle was built on a strategically important site first recognised by the Romans. **SOPHIE THÉRÈSE AMBLER** pays a visit

Nestled in the Eden Valley south-east of Penrith is Brougham Castle (pronounced "broom"). Approach across a sheep-grazed lawn, with the river Eamont ("yammon") on your right, and you'll see Brougham's keep rising from the red-stoned complex, square and elegantly Romanesque. Begun in the second decade of the 13th century, when castle builders favoured circular structures, it seems older than its years.

This picturesque scene belies Brougham's history. Exploring Brougham's keep, you'll realise the castle was built upon an ancient military site. On the second floor, you'll find a Roman tombstone reused in the ceiling, while stretching beyond the curtain wall and moat are the earthworks of a Roman fort, Brocavum. It guarded the road to Carlisle, and its particular strategic importance becomes clear as you turn north and see, beside the castle, the rivers Lowther and Eamont run together. This fort gave Brougham its name, from "burh", the Old English for fortified site. In this landscape, though, even Brocavum was a late accretion. Just south-west, between the Lowther and Eamont rivers, stand two prehistoric henges, Mayburgh and King Arthur's Round Table.

In the Middle Ages, the castle stood at the heart of what historians call Middle Britain, England's far north and Scotland's south, a political and cultural community that echoed the kingdom of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria. Its peoples arguably shared more in common than with southern England. It was the baronial cadre known as the Northerners that led rebellion against King John (reigned 1199–1216), obstructing his campaign to impose royal authority on the north. Brougham was built by John's captain Robert de Vieuxpont, who was granted the land to combat the king's enemies of Middle Britain.

A century later, the region was torn by conflict. In the mid-1290s, Edward I determined to subsume Scotland into his English empire, moving the Scots to war. Brougham was fortified by its then lord, Robert Clifford. He built the gatehouse, added a storey to the keep, and enclosed the complex with a curtain wall, overwatched from its south-west corner by a soaring tower.

Brougham's strategic importance became clear again in the Wars of the Roses, when its Clifford lords joined the Lancastrian side. The family briefly lost possession of the castle under Edward IV, but prospered under the Tudors and Stuarts, entertaining James VI & I in 1617. The castle's fabric was developed by Anne Clifford after 1650, together with a formal garden. But the fortress was abandoned in the early 18th century by its heir, the Earl of Thanet, and quickly fell into disrepair. The evocative ruins were visited by a young William Wordsworth, who in *The Prelude* described "the varied banks of Emont", and Brougham "low-standing by the margin of the stream". He and his sister climbed its "darksome windings of a broken stair" to look, "not without trembling… through some Gothic window's open space" to take in "the far-stretching landscape, by the light of morning beautified, or purple eve".

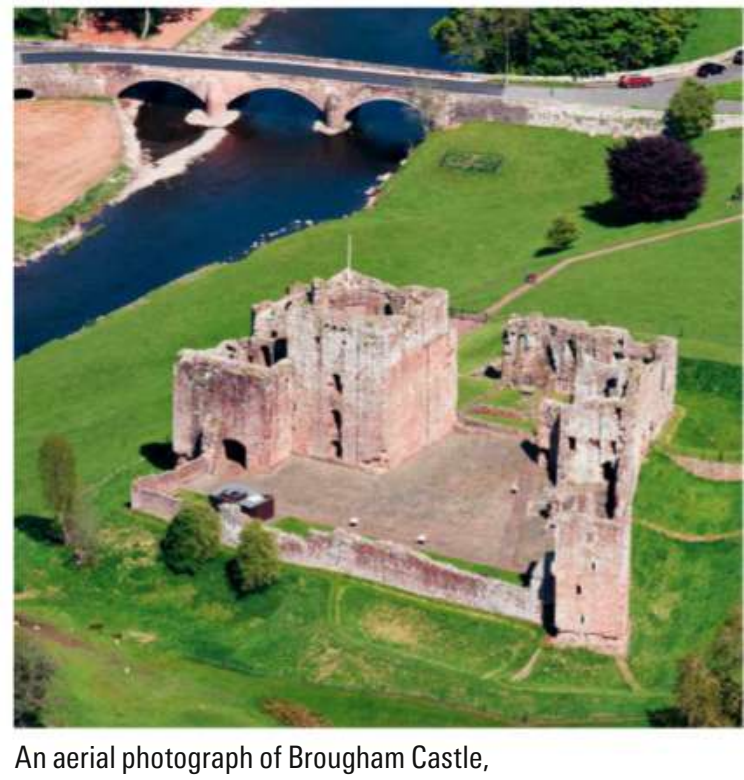
Today Brougham Castle is managed by English Heritage, and there's no need to book. Ask in the ticket office about the short circular walk taking in the nearby henges and skirting the Roman fort. H

"This ancient landscape made Brougham ideal for a momentous assembly, when an English king sought dominion over Britain"

Dr Sophie Thérèse Ambler is reader in medieval history and deputy director of the Centre for War and Diplomacy at Lancaster University

For more information, go to **english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/brougham-castle/**

Brougham Castle stands on the banks of the picturesque river Eamont near Penrith in Cumbria



An aerial photograph of Brougham Castle, which was built on an ancient military site

The view north from the third floor of the keep looks over the confluence of the Lowther and Eamont rivers

ALAMY

Light comes in through an arrowslit in the ruins of Brougham Castle, which saw much conflict over its long history

İSMET İNÖNÜ
1884 - 1973

National memorial
The mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (in the background of this picture) is the focal point of the Anıtkabir complex

DREAMSTIME.COM

An unmissable cultural capital

The vast urban heart of modern Turkey, Ankara doubles as the national capital and gateway to the Anatolian plain. It might not have the romantic views and continental collisions of Istanbul, nor its great rival's legacy of historical architecture. What Ankara lacks in visible ancient history, however, it more than makes up for with serious cultural heavy-hitters.

The Museum of Anatolian Civilisations is a must-visit, containing a host of wonders from the Neolithic, Hittite, Assyrian and other groups that called Anatolia home. Meanwhile, the citadel area is the most interesting part of the city to explore, with rambling alleyways and streets inside Byzantine-era walls. And, this being Turkey, there are ancient sights to see, including the remains of a Roman theatre and baths.

Towering over all of this is Anıtkabir, the vast tomb of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who did so much to establish Ankara's status and lay the foundations for the modern Turkish state. As well as the mausoleum there's a museum and lots more to explore on a visit to the complex.

There are several worthwhile day trips from Ankara. About 50 miles west lies Gordion, home of the legendary "knot" cut by Alexander the Great and a key ancient trading centre. Safranbolu makes a lovely overnight trip, with its Ottoman-era atmosphere and many old wooden buildings that are now hotels, shops and eateries. Lastly, Hattuşa, the capital of the ancient Hittite civilisation, feels wonderfully remote, though you may need your own wheels to reach it. Note, if you need another reason to visit, that Ankara has brilliant transport links to the rest of Turkey and to the world. H

IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- For a modern city offering a gateway to an ancient land, **Algiers** in **Algeria** is a good lesser-known option.
- Another modern capital city that provides an excellent gateway to historic wonders is **Skopje, North Macedonia.**

By **Tom Hall**, travel writer and co-author of *Lonely Planet's Guide to Train Travel in Europe* (2022)

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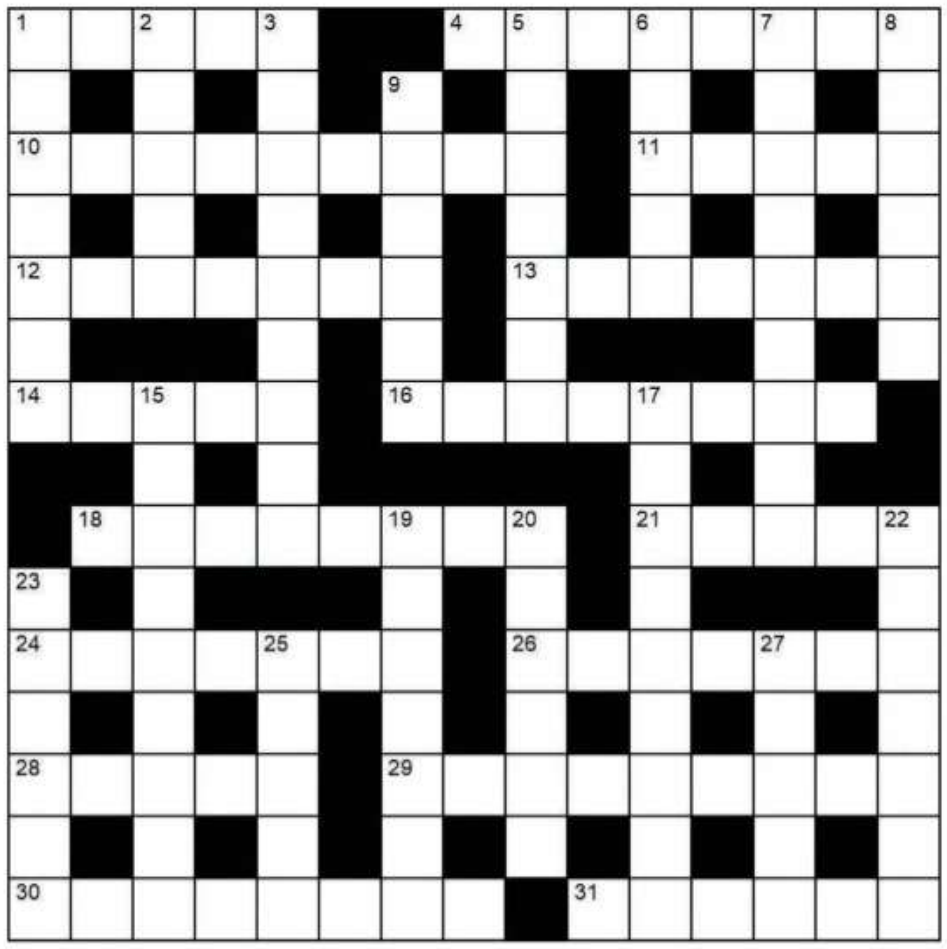
Kings and Queens

By Peter Snow & Ann MacMillan

From Alfred the Great to Queen Elizabeth II, the authors Peter Snow and Ann MacMillan explore the lives and reigns of the monarchs of England and, later, Britain. Spanning more than a millennium, this is a story of personal and political intrigue and power, told with insight by these two historians and broadcasters.



Across

1 Object of historical, often religious interest (5)
4 Turkish defeat in this naval battle of October 1827 consolidated Greek independence (8)
10 Side stalls and entertainment held on a frozen river in the early modern period (5,4)
11 The ____ Valley Civilisation on the Indian subcontinent was unknown to historians until the discovery of a city at Harappa in 1829 (5)
12 Alice ____, on whom Lewis Carroll based the title character of *Alice in Wonderland* (7)
13/30 Famous picture of Elizabeth I, named after the bird pendant she's wearing (7,8)
14 Anglicised name of the southern African people who, under Sobhuza I and his son Mswati II, established a nation now known as Eswatini in the early 19th century (5)
16 Important road that connected ancient Rome with the port of Brindisi (3,5)
18 11th-century leader of resistance to the Normans who made the Isle of Ely his base (8)
21 Code name of the largest of the two landing beaches assigned to American forces on D-Day, 1944 (5)
24 15th and 16th-century Dutch humanist, a major scholar of the northern Renaissance (7)
26 Scottish valley where MacDonald clan members were notoriously slain by government forces in 1692 (7)
28 African state that, led by the religious leader known as The Mahdi, fought Egyptian/British control in the late 19th century (5)
29 The battle of ____ (or Arbela) in October 331 BC spelled the end of the first Persian empire (9)
30 See 13 across
31 Small bomb, dating from the 16th century, used to blow in doors, for example (6)

Down

1 A clerk in the East India Company who founded the modern state of Singapore (7)
2 Harold ____, bespectacled film comedian and major Hollywood star of the 1920s (5)
3 ____ de' Medici, influential 16th-century political figure and mother of three French kings (9)
5 Commander of the Roman fleet that defeated Mark Antony at Actium (7)
6 A (now controversial) statue of Prospero and ____ by Eric Gill has adorned the BBC's Broadcasting House since 1933 (5)
7 Name for the region encompassing Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam when under French control (9)
8 Members of this powerful Roman family included popes Nicholas III and Benedict XIII (6)
9 The ____ ____ Line, an Israeli chain of fortifications along the Suez Canal, was broken by Egyptian forces in 1973 (3,3)
15 Emperor ____ II emancipated the Russian serfs (9)
17 Name applied to the series of concerts launched in London in 1895 by conductor Henry Wood (9)
19 Light spear, used by warriors of southern Africa including Zulu and Xhosa people (7)
20 Primitive boat made from a hollowed log (6)
22 Peter ____, 11th and 12th-century French theologian probably better known for a celebrated love affair than for his influential philosophical ideas (7)
23 William ____, 18th and 19th-century civil engineer whose projects include the Grand Junction (now Grand Union) Canal (6)
25 Term applied historically to an area of Asia roughly corresponding to modern Anatolia (5)
27 Soviet secret police organisation set up in 1917, a forerunner of the KGB (5)

Compiled by **Eddie James**

Who inspired the title character of Lewis Carroll's best loved children's book? *(12 across)*

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, November 2022 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA** or email them to ***November2022@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on **26 October 2022**. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the Christmas 2022 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ❑ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: *bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct*

Solution to our September 2022 crossword

Across 1 Cicero 4 Spithead 10 Melisende 11 Macau 12 Union 13 Starshell 14 Epidemic 16 Blount 19 Ralegh 20 Stari Ras 23 Broadside 25 Nobel 27 Remus 28 Isherwood 29 Sun King 30 *The Sun*
Down 1 Commune 2 Calvi 3 Rosenberg 5 Prefab 6 *Times* 7 Exchequer 8 Doublet 9 Onassis 15 Isle of Man 17 Lord North 18 Utrecht 19 Roberts 21 Saladin 22 Riding 24 Desai 26 Boots

Three winners of *Aerial Atlas of Ancient Britain*
N Jones, Somerset; A Ward, West Yorkshire; N Grogan, Greater London

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ALAMY

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There are many claims to be the oldest pub in Britain, but the majority do not stand up to scrutiny. James Wright investigates some of the potential candidates to determine whether it is possible to declare a winner.

historyextra.com/oldest-pub

15 minutes of fame

In celebration of our podcast's 15th anniversary, we asked historians to nominate people from the past who they believe deserve their 15 minutes of fame. You can now listen to all the episodes from the series online, ranging from a Chinese diplomat to a quarrelsome church reformer.

historyextra.com/15-minutes

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How did William come to the throne? Why was he nicknamed "Silly Billy" and "the sailor king"? What did he think about the Great Reform Bill that would transform his kingdom's democracy? John Van der Kiste presents a guide to the last Hanoverian king.

historyextra.com/William-iv

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NEXT MONTH

December issue on sale 27 October 2022

Marie Antoinette

Catriona Seth examines the life of the tragic French queen through her surviving letters

Royal accessories

Nicola Tallis investigates the jewellery worn by Henry VIII's six wives

March on Rome

RJB Bosworth charts Mussolini's path to power in Italy a century ago

Beyond the boy king

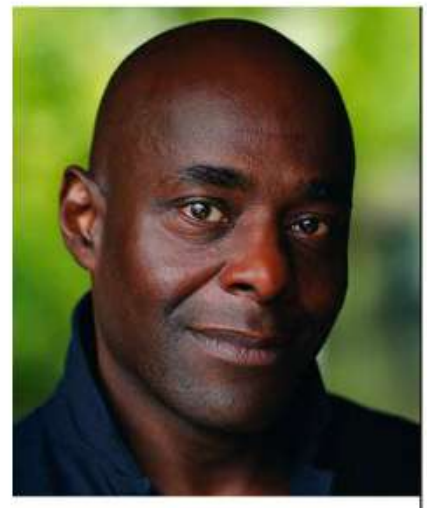
Guy de la Bédoyère explores life in Egypt in the age of Tutankhamun

MY HISTORY HERO

*Actor **Paterson Joseph** chooses*

Ignatius Sancho

c1729–80



The only surviving portrait of Ignatius Sancho was painted by Thomas Gainsborough in Bath on 29 November 1768. "His entire life was a finest hour when you consider the barriers he had to break through," says Paterson Joseph

IN PROFILE

Ignatius Sancho was an abolitionist, writer, composer and shopkeeper. Born on a slave ship, he was kept enslaved in Greenwich until he was 18, when he escaped to become a butler for the Duchess of Montagu. On her death he received an annuity of £30 which enabled him to open a shop in London and become a property owner. Sancho is the first black Briton known to have voted in a British election.

> "Sancho became a musician of such quality that he was able to write a book on the theory of music and dedicate it to Princess Charlotte"

When did you first hear about Sancho? I was chatting to Tilda Swinton while filming *The Beach* in Thailand and mentioned that I'd always wanted to find out more about the black Britons who lived in the UK before the Windrush generation – my parents' generation. That led me to Gretchen Gerzina's book *Black England* and it was there I learnt about him. He was a strange, amazing figure and needed to be written about, hence my novel.

What kind of man was he? He was physically obese and referred to himself as "Sancho the Fat". He also suffered from gout. But despite being a one-time slave, he moved freely in society and had friends among all classes, even the nobility. He also had a kind of vanity about him which you could see in his deportment, and the way he dressed and spoke. He was erudite and loved to show off his education, while his letters show he was determined to be British.

What made Sancho a hero? His determination not to be cowed by the conditions that his people faced at the time. Born a slave, the fact he was able to rise above that status and become a shop owner who could vote, makes him an extraordinary black Briton. I also admire his determination to be creative – for instance, he wrote catchy dance tunes.

What was Sancho's finest hour? First, escaping from the three Greenwich ladies who treated him like a pet when he was a boy and a young man. Second, becoming a musician of such quality that he was able to write a book on the theory of music and dedicate it to Princess Charlotte. Third, opening a grocery shop. And lastly, becoming the first black Briton to vote, in 1774; in 1780, he voted for the Whig politician Charles Fox, a proto-abolitionist and a customer at his shop. But his entire life was a finest hour when you consider the barriers he had to break through.

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about him? Yes, the fact that he was such an ardent monarchist. I think "class" is still a big problem in this country and a lot of that is down to us having a feudal-type system with a monarch.

Can you see any parallels between Sancho's life and your own? Yes, in the way that we both had humble roots, overcame obstacles to achieve success and became proud black Britons.

What would you ask Sancho if you could meet him? I'd ask him what his early life was like when he was kept as a slave by the ladies in Greenwich. That's still a mystery.

Paterson Joseph was talking to York Membery

Paterson Joseph is an actor who has appeared in *Peep Show*, *Noughts + Crosses* and *Vigil*. His debut novel, *The Secret Diaries of Charles Ignatius Sancho*, is out on 6 October (Dialogue Books)

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